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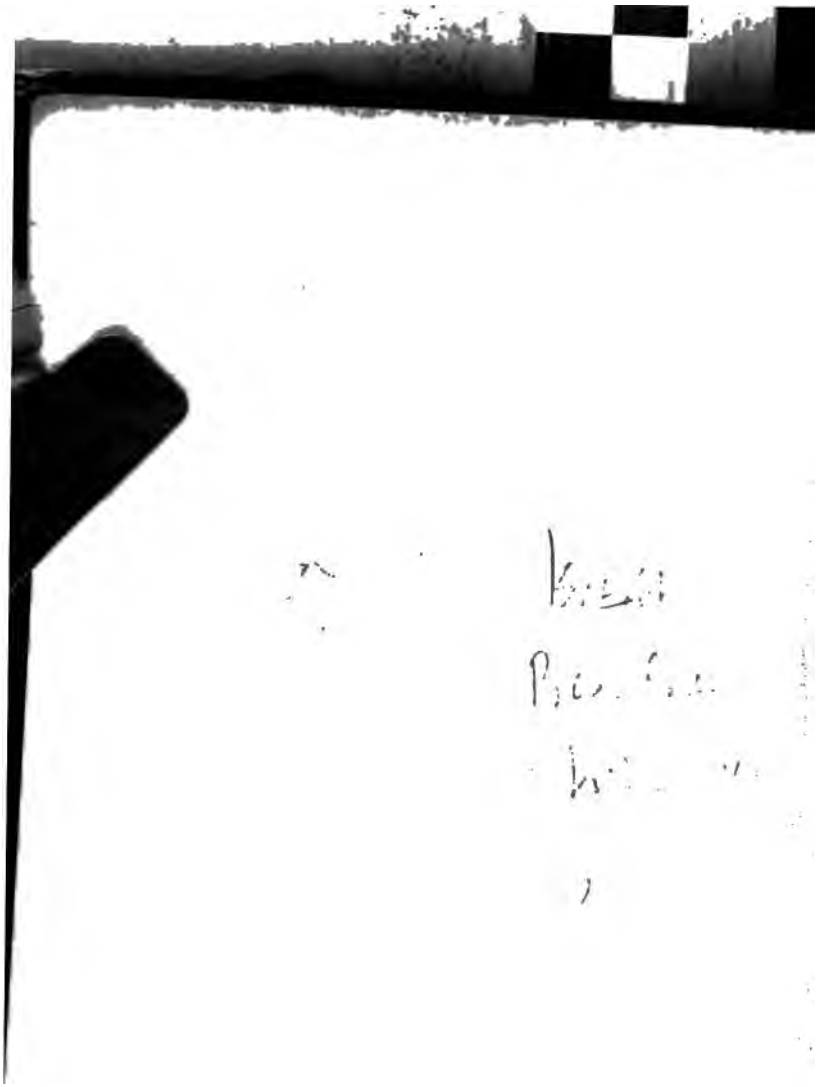
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THE CLIFF END

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CHAPTER I

TANKARD'S BUS is the most wonderful bus in the world—the biggest, blackest, brassiest, noisiest, reekiest, most overcrowded, most capacious. Only it isn't a coach at all, but a horse tram from Tankard's side-gate till it has a nodding acquaintance with Ilkeford's blind window. Its two horses stretch in a right angle along the wall, and still not more than a third of them is clear of the gate-posts without an end of overhang, so that it unbelievably reminds of its kind. No other bus has five-horse swing at its tail-end to pull with, and no other has so much brass. Five steps from the conductor's platform lead to the flight of stairs in Ulbrig—as many inches as there are miles in the run to bed—and to watch them all way together in a curve at a corner is something worth sitting in a gale for. As for its windows, the bus is one continuous transparency with them from end to end. Tankard's repainting in good dense must be awful.

There is no bus like Tankard's on the road. All the virtue of Ulbrig, of Wivvle, of Wetherington, of Sowgate—of this corner of Yorkshire even—has contained in its giant profounds, translated into the sacred symbols of sound, sight and smell. Only to take one sacramental sniff of its interior is to be filled as a perfumed vase with the breath and spirit and sympathy of the district; it is to fathom the soul of the soil, the heart of the heavy-headed corn, about to be cut; to sense the sensuous sway of barley in summer air of mystic communion; the staidness of turnips; the rustle of oats; the grateful green of pasture, tattooed slowly here and there with streaks of dun and wine-and-tan, and the fleecy grey blots of nibbling sheep; the murmur of many waves, the rippling cadence of the reapers; the busy hum of the threshing-machine, in indefatigable accent and tenacity of its three semitones. . . .

Yes, yes; all that in Tankard's Bus.

All that and more.

Tankard's Bus rolls out of Hunmouth every Saturday afternoon, having rolled in from Ullbrig in the dim hours of dawn, wet or fine, brimming over with butter-baskets and early scrubbed faces. It is timed to leave the Market Arms at three o'clock. To make quite sure of a corner seat, you would do well to be sitting in it by four o'clock at the latest. After this the butter-baskets begin to re-assemble one by one upon the cushions—some empty, with their white cover-cloths folded into neat squares, or falling in outline over the unfinished piece of pork pie that had to be set aside for the sale of the last pat; others bulky with the next week's groceries. Fare for the single journey, one shilling; double journey, one-and-six; children, half-price—that is because they give so much less trouble than grown-up people, and never stand on the cushions; small parcels, a penny.

The getting away of Tankard's Bus from Hunmouth on Saturday afternoons is a stupendous undertaking—only comparable, indeed, to the moving of mountains. Without faith it could not be done. What gives the impetus to that mighty chain of events whose final link is the bus's departure, or by what mysterious combination of agencies it is quickened



constituent elements and dispelling it altogether like mist to the sun. Not the receding waters were more elusive to the lips of Tantalus than are Tankard's passengers to his persuasions at this moment. Faces appear incidentally at the bus door, scanning the long column of baskets for intelligence of friends.

"Ye've gotten Missis Wetherby wi' ye, then? That'll be 'er basket wi' band lapped (wrapped) round t'andle, ah reckon."

Or, "What's gotten owd (hold) o' Jan Yenery? 'E's not i' market, an' ah can mek nowt of 'is basket onniweers."

Or, "Ah s'll 'a time ti get ti Stringer's an' back, ah see. Ye weean't be ready yet a bit."

And disappear again forthwith, like the illusive figments of a dream.

"Coom, coom!" says Tankard, with fretful appeal, upraising himself in monumental rebuke to the roadway over the bus top. "Let's 'a ye inside—some on ye, at onny rate—and let's be gettin' started. Ah nivver seed nowt like it . . . ye're wuss nor a lot o' sheep sketterin' about bus yend. Whativver sort of a time div ye think it'll be by we get ti Oolbrig?"

"Why! what's use o' stewin' us up i' bus yet awhile, mun?" says a rebellious voice out of the radius of Tankard's eye—on the steps by the sound of it. "We s'll 'a plenty o't bus an' all when she get's o't road, ah reckon, an' ah'm none so fond of 'er at onny time. . . . What div ye say?"

"Ah say an' all," says Tankard, subsiding in muffled exasperation from his sculptured eminence, ". . . ah say it's eneugh to sicken a pig, what wi' waitin' an' waitin' an' better waitin', an' both 'osses i' shafts ready to mek a start, an' me callin' of ye till ah'm fair black i' face. *That's* what *ah* say. Ah mud as lief (soon) be talkin' to stones. It's not a bit o' use sayin' nowt to onny on ye."

"Nay, it's na use sayin' nowt," says Dixon's genial voice from behind, with maddening agreement, and all is silent but the eye of Tankard upon the box.

So the getting away goes on, the big bus simmering slowly in sunshine up to the moving point like an engine under steam. Every now and then somebody comes to look inside for somebody else, and departs (regardless of Tankard's protests), not finding him; and somebody else returns in somebody's absence, and leaves in turn likewise, clearing somebody's re-arrival by a swear's width. In such fashion the bus's departure is put off till the moment that Tankard, frothing at the mouth, remembers which of his commissions has been forgotten, and goes off

gibbering to execute it. His departure is the signal for a general paroxysm in the bowels of the bus. There begins a frenzied transfer of the reins, from the last man to whose fingers Tankard bequeathed them to the last who will undertake their custody, after which they are looped over the brake and abandoned to their own devices. Halfway on his breathless return Tankard stops to expostulate with the foremost member of the exodus contingent, and arrives to find the bus deserted once more, its occupants scattered hopelessly over the roadway like a fall of coster's apples, and requiring as much picking up. Anyone with less nerve than Tankard, or less mastery over all the intricacies of his business, would surely bury his head between both arms on the roof of the bus from the box seat and weep like a child. But Tankard does not weep—he has too much to do with his eye for that.

"Theer's no sense in it!" he exclaims, getting down from his perch and coming round to the door for the fiftieth time, to see who has slipped out of his hands since the last stock-taking. "Ah'm sure ah'm fair sickened o't job. It's nowt bud clammerin' up an' down bus side. Noo then. Are we right this go off an' all?"

By false starts alone the bus consumes some fifty yards of its homeward journey, and what with much declamatory pulling up and the doing of desperate marionette work with his eye

"We're off an' all this go, onny'ow," says Jan Yenery, when the heads of either side have done bobbing at each other like corks in a pail of water, and the seats are rocking level again. "What time will it be, Mester Barclay?"

"When?" asks Barclay, with that facetiousness for which he is so widely famed. "It'll be twelve o'clock by midneet, ah's think."

"Ay, bud noo?" says Jan Yenery, and he and Barclay wink meaningly all round the bus from their respective standpoints in the humour. A Yorkshireman is fond of his joke—and he makes it as well as any man I know, barring a heavy hand for the crust at times—but he doesn't like to see it go untasted.

Cumbrously Tankard's Bus noses clear of the great seaport city, threading its way undismayed through the dizzy network of masts and rigging and multi-coloured sloping funnels that complicate every corner; rumbling tranquilly down broad thoroughfares where huge ships, many times the bus's own size, lie sleeping across the roadway like obstinate big dogs, on shop doors and in the shadow of churches. The bus mounts on to frail little movable bridges that span thin widths of winking water, crawling carefully across them like a great garden slug over a blade of grass, and shaking its tail free of their restraint on the home side with a momentary trot. Then, unshackling its wheels of the tram-lines, it turns into the long last road, where the houses dwindle and draw back behind wooden palisades, with three odd yards of hard earth, dandelion roots, asphalt, oyster-shells, and all the other attributes of a suburban garden, in between; then houses set four yards back following on these, marking the progress; and houses five yards back with shrubs and box-borders, and semi-detached gardens with side-walls and trees looking over, holding the golden sunlight cradled in their leaves, that make welcome black shadows on the pavement below; and great wide gateways giving access to the pleasure-park of the great city, with its conflux of holiday-makers beyond, abloom with bright blouses and ribbons and the noiseless commingling of bicycles; and after this, dejected-looking building sites, with the scurvy of bricks and mortar already upon them, eating into their green; and after these, hedges and fields and trees and the parting of roads, with Hunmouth a dust-cloud in the distance—a mere smoked edge of the blue dome. The sun pours his melon-ripe rays into the bus as it journeys, gilding the legs of the two end sitters, a-swing behind out of the open door, and from

time to time illuminating the golden double column of faces that meet in the middle to gaze backwards or to chorus greeting to the swifter vehicles that overtake them unceasingly for the first part of the journey.

Once well in the country, the bus begins to strew a trail of passengers and baskets behind it along the road-side. At every garden-gate there is somebody waiting with a far-beaming starlike smile and a ready word. There is no lane end so lonely but that a voice will hail Tankard from it, brimful of the commission poured into his distressed ear on the outward journey in the early dawn.

"Did ye get them seeds, mester? 'Ow are ye, Jan? Ye're out again, it seems. Nay, ye've nivver gone an' forgotten 'em, ah *sewd* think!"

Every chimney is a bar to the bus's progress; at each distant red tile rising over the hedge-tops there is a sudden stir of feet in the straw, and somebody gets up, saying:

"Well, ah s'll 'a to be leavin' ye. Way, mester, ye mun't tek me off ti Oolbrig."

Whereupon the "Way!" is passed generously from mouth to mouth down the bus to the door, growing as it goes with every variety of inflection and dramatic emphasis:

"Waay!"

"Woooh!"



gathered round its mistress give vent to a joyous bark as the figure of Ullswater emerges from the mist-wreathed evening light.

Ullswater! Ullswater! Ullswater!

With the voice of Barclay in my memory I went to the little boy with a big collie:

"Nay, nay, sonny. So we still and don't seem to get any nearer. She's come into enough as it is, as she must I will thank ye kindly to the end. Isn't it time I walked on at once?"

CHAPTER II

WHEN summer comes Mrs. Gatheredge talks of repapering her parlour, and Ginger gets him ready to sleep in the scullery at a night's notice, but the letting of lodgings is not a staple industry in this quarter of Yorkshire, and folks would fare ill on it who knew nothing of the art of keeping a pig or growing their own potatoes in the bit of garden at the back.

Visitors pass through, indeed, in large enough numbers between seed and harvest-time (mostly by bicycle), staring their way round the village from house to house as though these were the cages in a menagerie for which *bonâ-fide* entrance-money had been paid at the door, and vexatiously misleading windows into expectations of development through an exasperating gaze of inquiry. But all that ever develops is an occasional request for a cup of water—in the hope, no doubt, that we may give them milk—or an interrogation as to the road to somewhere else. Steg's reply to the latter, through a long succession of summers, has waxed into a set formula, which he prepares with all the exactness of a prescription:

[redacted]

comes for a month, is charged unprotesting for lights and fire, never lends a hand to the washing of its own pots, and pays town price for country butter. Our local designation for such guests—when we get them—is "spawers."

The word is apt to strike chill on urban understandings when heard for the first time, like a glass of iced soda-water on an unprepared stomach. I remember when Ginger sprang it upon me on the initial occasion of my hearing it, I was filled for a moment with an indefinable sense of calamity, balancing for exact understanding between baneful bum-bailiffs and that woolly disease the flies die of against the looking-glass in autumn.

"Well," were Ginger's words, greeting me and leaving me almost in a breath. "Ah wish ah mud stay longer wi' ye noo, but ah mun't. We've gotten spawers i' 'oose (house)."

I shook his earth-worn hand with that degree of comprehensive warmth which should suggest sorrowing sympathy to a mind quickened through trouble, but nought beyond fervour to the ruder tissues of health.

"There's always something . . . for some of us . . . " I said oracularly.

"We mud as well 'ev 'em as onnybody," Ginger remarked, with what I took to be rare resignation at the time, and we parted.

It was in the green, early days of July, when the corn waved slumbrously back and forth over the hedge-tops, beating time to soundless adagios like a sleepy-headed metronome, and as yet there were few scorched patches in summer's rippling gown of emerald silk, that the Spawer arrived. Steg was one of the first to give tidings of his advent to Ullbrig, and after him Mrs. Grazer, who met him on his way home, bearing the intelligence laboriously with his mouth open, like a brimming pail of milk.

"'Ev ye 'eard 'ow Mester Jenkison' mother' sister-in-law's gettin' on, Steg?" she asked him, before he was ready to speak first.

"Ay," says Steg, with a watchful eye upon his own intelligence, set momentarily down, and waiting his turn.

"'Ow is she, then?"

"She's deead."

"Nay! Is she an' all! Poor owd woman!"

"She is that!" says Steg, warming with a sense of triumph to the work, as though he had the credit of her demise. It is good to be the bearer of tidings, and feel oneself a factor in

the world's rotation. "She deed ti morn (this morning) at aif-past six."

"An' when's t' buryin'? Did y'ear?"

"Ay, they telt me," says Steg.

"It'll be o' Thosday, ah's think."

"Nay, bud it weean't," Steg replied, mounting up another step by contradiction towards the top rung of his ladder. "Wensday. There's ower much thunder about for keepin'." Then he struck up still higher without loss of time. "They've gotten a spawer up at Clift," he said.

The intelligence was a guest at every tea-table in Ullbrig the same day, Steg and Mrs. Grazer having done wonders in its dissemination under wholesome fear of forestalment. Mrs. Grazer beat Steg by a short head at Shep Stevens', but Steg cut the triumph away from under her feet at Gatheredge's. To all intents and purposes they ran a dead heat at the brewery, only Mrs. Gatheredge's superior riding put Steg's nose out on the post.

"Steg'll 'a telt ye they've gotten a spawer up at Clift Yend," she said, with diabolical cunning, just as Steg's mouth was opening for the purpose, snatching the prize from his very lips.

"Nay, Steg's telt us nowt," repudiated the brewer. "Steg's nobbut just this minute walked i' yard. Ev' they an' all? Up at Clift Yend?"

"'E come o' Monday," Steg chimed in morosely, picking up

Indeed! . ." mere extemporaneous utterances for holding him in check while the interrogative noose was being got ready to shackle his feet.

"Ay. . . . So there's nobbut one on 'em, then? It'll be newspaper man fro' Oommuth (Hunmouth), ah's think—'im 'at was 'ere last back-end."

"Nay, bud no," Steg answered, with decision, plucking up brightly at the sight of unspoliated pickings. "It's a right new un this time."

"'E'll be fro' Oommuth, though," said the brewer, going down squarely on the bilge of a beer barrel after a cautious look backward.

"Nay, an' 'e's not fro' Oommuth naythur," said Steg, with zest, knocking glad music for his soul out of negations as though they were the notes of a dulcimer.

"Why! Where is 'e fro', then?" asked the brewer, in genuine surprise. Visitors to Ullbrig who don't come from Hunmouth can hardly be conceived to come from anywhere. We divide the world into two constituents, town and country, Hunmouth being the town.

"Ah nivver thought to ask," said Steg, after a thinking pause; "bud 'e's not fro' Oommuth. . . . Ah'm none so sure," he added, straining the chords of his actual intelligence for the sake of a little extra effect, "'at 'e's not fro' Lunnon."

"Ah think not, Steg," said the brewer quickly, rejecting the probability without consideration, like the blind man's box of matches pushed under his nose in Hunmouth.

"Ah'm none so sure an' all, though," Steg said again, urged into a defence of his position by the brewer's attitude, and sticking with some show of obstinacy to a neutral contention.

"Ah think not," the brewer repeated briefly for the second time. "Lunnon's a long way off'n Clift Yend."

"Ay, but ah'm none so sure, ah tell ye," Steg urged, real conviction growing in him out of contradiction, as is the way of all flesh. "'E's lived a deal i' furrin parts, onny'ow," he said craftily, making a counter demonstration to relieve pressure on the main issue, and retiring under its cover from the assailed position.

"Which on 'em?" inquired the brewer, with disconcerting directness.

"T' most part on 'em, ah think," Steg replied, after the shifting of a boot, his vocabulary of foreign lands failing him

under sudden stress, but being wishful to give his statement all possible support.

"France, 'as 'e?" asked the brewer, testing this broad statement of fact by the application of specifics.

"Ay," said Steg, suspiciously acquiescent, with a big bold affirmative like the head of a tadpole, thinning out all suddenly into a faint wriggling tail of protective caution——"ah think so."

"Jarmany?" asked the brewer.

"Ay," said Steg again, ". . . ah think so."

"Roo-shah?" the brewer went on judicially, suddenly of a mind to turn this interrogation into a geographical display, but with a keen eye for the limits of his territory.

"Ay," repeated Steg, gathering such momentum of assent that he had buried his reply in the brewer's second syllable before he could stop himself, with his tail sticking out by the interrogation mark—"ah think so."

"Hitaly?" queried the brewer, pausing through a futile endeavour to pronounce whether America was a foreign part or not. "Choina? Hindia?"

"Nay," Steg demurred, with wily scruple, recognising the value of a little conscientious negation as moral backbone to all his assent, "ah'm none so sure about t' last."

"'E's travilled a deal, 'owseumdivver," said the brewer,

oot. 'E's ta'en rooms for a month at start wi' chance t stoppin' on if 'e likes 'em, an' 'e's brought a heavy load t things wi' 'im. 'E's brought a bath. . . .'

"A bath!" said the brewer blankly, interrogation and rejection in visible conflict over the word. Common home furnishing in Ullbrig stops at the wash-tub. Beyond this all is vanity. "What diz 'e want wi' a bath?"

"Nay . . ." Steg said, declining any conflict on the unaccountabilities of strange men from far places. "Ah'm nobbut tellin' ye same as they've telt me," he added half-apologetically in fear lest he might be accused of sympathies with false worship. "It's a rare great bath an' all, by what they say—like one o' them big drums wi' a cover on it. Ye've nobbut to gie it a ding wi' yer 'and an' it sets up a grand sound as nowder. Onny road, that's what Jeff Dixon says, an' 'e ought to know. 'E wor dingin' it all last week."

"Some folks 'as fancies," said the brewer, with supernal scorn.

"Ay . . . an' ah was nigh forgettin' . . ." Steg struck in. "'E's gotten a 'armonium comin' an' all. It'll nobbut be me before so very long, noo."

"A 'armonium!" exclaimed the brewer, testing the word incredulously upon his understanding. "Nay," he said, after testing it with his own lips, "nay, ah think we're wrong this time, Steg."

"Nay, bud ah'm not," Steg stuck out, wagging his head sagely with the assurance of one who has both feet well planted.

"Bud ah think y' are," the brewer said in affable contradiction, rocking agreeably on his coat.

"A pianner, then," Steg hazarded after staring fixedly for a space with a wrestle going on adoriously behind his eyes. "It's all same thing I yend."

"Nay, nor a pianner neyther," cried the brewer, refusing the substitute with equal disregard. "Folks doesn't get 'armoniums nor pianners about wi' 'em fro' place to place i' that road. It'll be a concerteeny we're thinkin' on, agen."

"Nay, it weean't," Steg said slowly.

"What'll it be, then?"

"It'll be a pianner," he said, carrying the consonant mercilessly in his mouth as a dog does a bone, and seeing that the brewer did not risk wrestling it from him by force.

"'Oo says it will?" he inquired, temporizing vacuously after this convincing display of faith.

"I do," said Steg, toll-gathering masterfully for himself.

"Ay, bud 'oo telt you?" demanded the brewer.

"Gyles' lad," said Steg.

"An' 'oo telt 'im?" the brewer continued, pursuing the inflexible interrogative path to fundamentals.

"Arny."

"Arny Dixon?"

"Ay, 'e did."

"Arny Dixon 'issen?"

"Ay, Arny Dixon 'issen. There's not two of 'em."

"Arny Dixon telt Gyles' lad and Gyles' lad telt you, ye say?"

"Ay, ah do," said Steg, with a voice that cried for no abatement of its responsibility.

The brewer gave one thigh a moment's respite off the hard cask, and after that the other.

"Well!" he said, shirking further combat after this sight of his opponent's moral muscle, and slipping the cloak of ambiguities over his stripped fighting form. "There'll be time enough an' all, Steg. Them 'at lives longest sees most, they say."

"Ay, thess sess-sooah!" (they say so), Steg assented, with equanimity.

A shadow fell across the brewer's yard; an irresolute, halting shadow—the shadow of one with half a mission and

CHAPTER III

On the morrow Jeff Dixon appeared in Ullbrig. He was seen to ride three times homeward up the High Street during the dinner-hour (each time adjudged his last) ringing the bell of a bran-new bicycle, shouting over both shoulders and showing much unfriendliness to a large following of admirers with alternate boots. Word settled down upon the village like a flight of celestial doves that he had made a purchase at Mrs. Fussitter's, and Father Mostyn, who knew for certain (having witnessed his leave), arrayed himself for an inquisitorial visit.

He put on the broken-backed, dismembered Academic mortar-board, with all its corners missing, that has given him an undying reputation for learning in this quarter of the globe, being regarded by Ullbrig, through eyes of awesome respect, as a sort of ecclesiastical black cap—a cap of judgment and sentence, symbolical of damnation and the dead languages.

The very first time Jabe Stevens saw it, he said:

"Feythur, yon'll be a wonnerful larned man, divn't ye suppose? 'E'll read Latin as easy as t' name i' my 'at, an' speak the dead tongues like you an' me does English, shouldn't ye think to say?"

"Ay," said Shep the father carelessly, punctuating his sentence with three commas of tobacco juice. "'Appen 'e will."

With which parental sanction Jabe told the village:

"Yon's a wonnerful larned man, mi feythur says. 'E reads Latin as easy as t' name i' my 'at, an' speaks t' dead tongues like you an' me does English."

After the cap comes the cassock, with its long, sinuous line of close, beady black buttons running all the way up to Father Mostyn's chin. It made a seismic upheaval of mud when it showed first in Ullbrig—some of which still stays on the Vicarage door.

"Noa Poapery!" was the battle-cry in the village for twelve full months after by the moon, whenever the rustle of the cassock went abroad, rising from remote hedges and hay-ricks and wall-angles lumpy with foreheads. Even to this day occasion finds an echo to the cry, though the tall, ecclesiastical

figure, with the stoop of the student and the genial shamble of the convivialist combined, is known every inch of the district for miles around. Wherever he goes there are thumbs jerking at him over hedges, and pitchforks off stack-tops, and whips from distant vehicles, and elbows from slowly-moving manure carts, to voices that say:

"Yon's 'im, see ye! Yon's Feythur Mostyn fro' Oolbrig! Yon's parson 'at smokes folk out o' choch, an' gets agate of 'is knees to himages!"

Glorious reputation!—tinged with awesome superstition and rebellious respect, that Father Mostyn scents pungent up his nostrils with the zest of incense, snuff, and life's own breath. He has the very nose for the purpose; the high-bridged pontifical Roman of ritualism and birth—admirable organ for expressing appreciations, displeasures, scorns, intolerances, and the condescensions of pride. It can sniff at a chapel with one insufferable arch of its nostrils till you wait breathless, clutching back both hands, for the whole building to go out in a flicker before your eyes like a snuffed candle. This faculty is acknowledged with much resentment in Ullbrig.

"Chapel mud be a rotten 'errin' bi' t' way 'e sets 'is nose up at it," demurred Dingwall Jackson, who has his name graven on one of the foundation-stones with three more, and is a pillar of dissent—even within his own fold. "What's yon for



avoid : . . were struggling any use. Misled by evil companions in the torn-collar days of my youth into heading a conspiracy for connecting his front-door handle with the gate. I speak from understanding. That one word uttered by him as by no one else in the world, is like a barbed hair for catching every kind of fish, from the whales of schism to the smelt of petty heresies. It brings up repentance, apologies, alms, tears, despair, wit, humour, and laughter—just as however he casts the line to his inclination.

To Shep Stevens he has but to say "Ha!" on occasions demanding, and Shep's voice makes answer from under his hat-brim as he shuffles by:

"Ay, ah know ah did, bud ah'm seein' folly o' my ways." Or in more despondent mood: "Ay, it's no use sayin' nowt to me, ah'm past mendin'."

Sometimes, indeed, a mere uplifting of those steel man-trap brows will suffice. And on desperate occasions, urged on to confess by the fatal magnetism of Father Mostyn's back from afar, Shep has been known to hurl himself to his doom unsummoned, crying aloud across the road:

"Ah repent, Feythur Mostyn: ah repent! Get thee behind me, Satan."

Repentance that generally sets later in the day like a sullen sun, in clouds of discontent, with:

"T' owd devil! 'Oo's been tellin' 'im ah 'ave count in a glass or two o' Saturday? Ah think 'e knows everythink there is, ommost (almost)."

You may not come into Ullbrig without Father Mostyn's knowledge, not even by night, with your boots off. You may not pass that watchful yellow chink in his shutters going homeward on your hands and knees beneath a starless sky, holding both boots in your mouth, as far away from the Vicarage windows as the opposite wall will let you, without his knowledge, for he knows the characteristics of every incident in Ullbrig (suppressed or no) and will acquaint you with the fact obliquely, the very first time you fail to step him at a corner, which will be the first time you try.

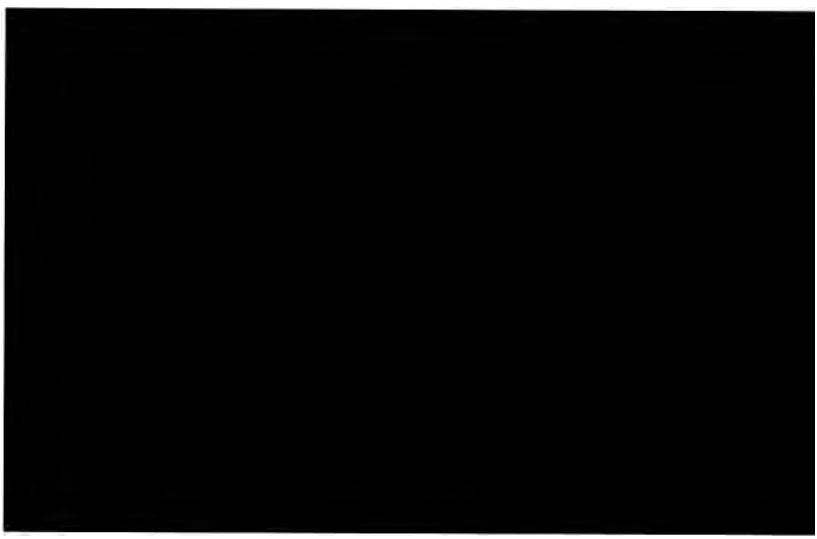
"'E's gotten a lug (ear) like a speakin'-trumpet," Shep has been heard to say of him, having succeeded as far as the Vicarage step one night with a piece of chalk, and no further. "T' owd sod mun (must) 'ear flies walkin' o' ti *roof*, an' think."

"An' what about seein' an' all?" demanded Ding Jackson, with a voice of experience. "'E can see o' both sides of 'is yed (head), an' at back as well. Ah'd no sooner putten my

tongue out nor ah'd to be quick at lickin' my mouth wi' 'er, or 'e'd 'a copped me, for sure."

Last of all, Father Mostyn took the familiar ebony divining rod, carved ivory-headed, that would be recognised suspiciously in anybody else's hand for twenty miles around, and dipped into Fussitter's shop for his weekly lobster, a day before due.

"Fish for the faithful on Friday," he reminded the counter, as his hand reached inside to the latch over the half-door. "Is the lobster holding out?"



CHAPTER IV

"Noo then, yer Rivrence," said Mrs. Fussitter, who was waiting for him in the shop, having heard the Vicarage gate creak, ready to bale her soul of its intelligence without delay. "Ay, ah think there'll be a tin or two yet awhile, an' traveller comes o' Tuesday. Nivver mind sneck . . . it's nowt bud nuisance. Ah've no patience wi' it, ah-sure; it'll naythur shut nor oppen. Mah wod! they've some nice company up at Clift this time an' all. Y' ought to been a bit sooner. Ah've 'ad Jeff Dixon i' shop not so long sin' (since) ridin' a fine new-fashioned boycicle. Noo ye should just 'a seed my young gentleman."

"Ha!" said Father Mostyn illuminatively, fusing Mrs. Fussitter's intelligence with inward conviction through the word. "I knew I couldn't be mistaken. I noticed the track of a bicycle on the road as I crossed over. The ribbing on the tyre was unfamiliar to me, except that I'd seen it once before (after our visitor passed through to the Cliff); but judging from the line of its course, I knew he couldn't be riding to-day. The curves were local. You can't mistake them. *A posteriori*, I argued it would be one of the Dixons—Geoffrey, I felt convinced. His style in the saddle is strenuous at all times, but particularly so, no doubt, on a bran-new borrowed bicycle. Let's pray it mayn't lead our young brother into disaster. His pride has been courting it within an inch of the cobbles already. . . . I suppose he was scarcely in a condition to say how he had left them all at the Cliff End? . . . In a dream, no doubt."

"Ay! . . . Well! See! Noo that's about it, yer Rivrence. Mah wod! ah'd seummut to do to keep 'im while ah'd gotten pepper lapped up—'e was that set o' showin' 'is-sen round village. As for gettin' owt out'n 'im . . . it was like drawin' butter fro' a dog's throat. 'E could say nowt bud 'Noo then, en't ye gotten it weighed?' 'Noo then, en't ye gotten it lapped?' 'Noo then, en't ye gotten it ready?' till ah-sure ah was fit to loss my temper wi' 'im. 'Noo then,' ah says tiv 'im i' yend, 'noo then, wi' yer noo thens! en't ye forgotten yer manners an' all—speakin' tiv yer elders i' that road?'

Ah'd to stick tight to my young gentleman, an' no mistake, else 'e'd 'a been out o' shop before ye could say Jack Robison, an' me no wiser nor when 'e come in. Ah did get to knaw a bit o' seummut, 'owseumdivver. 'Is mother's very well, 'e says 'e thinks, though 'e's not sure, bud 'e says they're rare an' set up wi' their company. Ah est (asked) 'im 'ow they was gettin' on wi' 'im, an' 'e says, gettin' on grand. 'E telt me 'e's a bonny young man—not so much older nor Arny, by what ye can tell, an' as nice ti talk ti as ti look at. Some of our Oolbrig young ladies 'll 'ev to be seein' to their ribbons, ah think. Ah-sure, ah'm real jealous to get a look at 'im after what Jeff's been sayin'. Let me seeah. No . . . where did ah put my 'and o' them tins? Ah know very well there ought to be one, for Mrs. Gatheredge changed to salmon nobbut yistiday. . . ."

"Ha!" Father Mostyn interposed, with an imperious extension of forefinger, arresting Mrs. Fussitter's cap on its way for a dive through the red right-hand curtain into the public depths of the provision window, "stop a bit. The vicar's lobster, if you please. Not out of the window there; I won't have lobster out of the window. The sunlight has a peculiar chemical action upon the tin, liberating certain constituents of the metal exceedingly perilous to the intercostal linings. No lobster out of the window for me."

"Ay, ah declar'! Noo what am ah thinkin' on? Ah'm

being discharged in Hunmouth. He doesn't want those. What he wants is the crayfish brand from under the counter, with nothing of the label torn off. Yes, that's it. That's the very thing. Like that—just like that. There's the picture of the crayfish on the outside, you see, and the tin-opener to hand."

"Ay!" said Mrs. Fussitter, coming up from behind the counter in beaming full blossom of voluble relief at this acceptance. "Ah knowed very well ah'd gotten a tin put away for ye somewheers, if only ah could think on. Ah remember noo settin' it aside o' purpose. Ah'll lap it up i' thick brown paper so's it'll tek no 'arm gannin' across i' sunlight. Let me seeah! Noo what was ah sayin' before we got agate o' ti lobster?"

Father Mostyn lent an abstracted eye to her retrospective search, following afar, void of comprehension or discovery.

"Ay! Ah know. . . ." Mrs. Fussitter took up quickly, like a stitch at knitting, without waiting to be prompted; ". . . about Dixon lads an' all. Ay! Well! Noo ah's think they'll be just suited down ti ground to 'ave a little company o' that sort at Clift Yend. Jeff says 'e laughs an' chats wi' 'em same as if 'e'd been 'i place all 'is days, an' sets talkin' wi' 'is feythur after supper while it's time for bed. 'E says they divn't rightly know way to reckon 'im up yet a bit. 'E seems to 'ev plenty o' money to knock about wuld (world) by what they can make out, an' 'e's brought plenty o' fine things wi' 'im, bud 'e laughed when Mrs. Dixon tried 'im one day wi': 'Ye seem strange an' fond o' singing', Mester Wynne.' 'Ay,' 'e says, 'it's no song no supper wi' me, Mrs. Dixon . . . an' no dinner an' breakfast as well, 'appen!' 'e telt 'er. 'E called 'issen a labourer to Jeff, but that's nobbut 'is fun. 'What sort of a labourer?' Jeff asked 'im. 'A poorish sort of a labourer,' 'e says, 'bud ah've got to dig for my livin' same as t' rest, an' not so much i' my pocket at week yend, naythur.' 'Let's look at yer 'ands,' Jeff says, an' as soon as 'e seed 'em: 'Them's none diggin' 'ands,' 'e telt 'im; an' ti Spawer laughed. 'Ah divn't dig wi' my 'ands,' 'e says. 'What div ye dig wi', then?' Jeff says. 'Wi' my yed (head),' he says. 'Ay, ah's think so,' Jeff telt 'im. 'E's full o' fun.

"'E's brought a bath wi' 'im," she went on, "an' a big round spy-glass, ah understood Jeff to say, to shave by; an' a deal o' furrin books . . . an' fortygrafts . . . an' a rare wonnerful dressin'-case wi' all sorts o' contrivances . . . an' 'e dizn't gan to bed i' a neet-goon (night-gown), Jeff says, but 'e slips 'issen

into a jacket an' troosers, wi' a pocket for 'is 'andkercher an' all, as grand as ye please. . . ."

She was babbling blithely down a commaless catalogue of the Spawer's possessions, when the face of the prophet Steggison flattened itself all suddenly against the window, and having noted the shop's occupancy, roved about avertedly from pane to pane, under direct observance, in pathetic supplication to be questioned.

"Noo! . . . Is that Steg an' all?" Mrs. Fussitter broke off to exclaim, at sight of him, down the third yard of her inventory. "'E looks as though 'e'd gotten seummut to tell us, ah think. 'Ev ye, Steg?"

"Spawer's o' ti road to Oolbrig," the voice of Steggison said thereupon, with nothing visible of him but an eye probing the latch-hole from a respectful foot back, and making modestly as for departure. "Butcher's passed 'im 'i spring-cart."

"Stop a bit," Mrs. Fussitter called to the vanishing eye, that forthwith did not vanish. "Is it you 'at cares owt (aught) about pear-drops?"

"Ay, it's me," answered Steg, his fingers evidenced on the latch, but politely awaiting the summons to enter.

"Come i'side, then," said Mrs. Fussitter, and he came, neck and nose with the order.

"Spawer's o' ti road to Oolbrig," he said, reciting his articles again in the shop at Father Mostyn's "Ha, Steggison!"

CHAPTER V

WHERE the roadway splits on the trim, green prow of Hesketh's high garden-hedge, dipping down like the trough of a wave and sliding along the cool, moss-grown wall beneath a tangle of leafy rigging towards the sunlit opens of Cliff Wrangham, Father Mostyn filmed his predatory eye, and the Spawer came round the corner, going homeward.

The strong sunlight got him first of all, striking up one-half of a snowy figure in cool holland, then the side shadow swallowed entire a leg, and after that the dappled splashes of green and gold fell softly in equable mellow shower as he sank beneath the branches. Shoulders higher than many and shorter than some—narrower too, though with nothing of feebleness about them; legs lengthy enough for the adequacies of dignity or condescension, but not too attenuated for control, falling into the step of leisure through habit, and without any greedy grasping at indolence as an opportunity too rare to be missed—so often the betrayal of legs accustomed to hurry six days in the week; a tall, lithe figure of young manhood, with the idle bearing of one whose activity is all in the upper storey; eyes brown, steadfast, and kindly, less for the faculty of seeing things than of thinking them; brows lying at ease apart, but with the tiny, tell-tale couple-crease between them for linked tussle—brows that might hitch on to thought with the tenacity of a steel hawser; a jaw fine, firm, and resolute, closing strongly over determination, though void of the vicious set of obstinacy, with a little indulgent, smiling, V-shaped cleft in the chin for a mendicant to take advantage of; lips seemingly consecrate to the sober things of this life, yet showing too a sunny corner for its mirthmakings and laughters beneath the slight slant of moustache—scarcely more tawny than its owner's sun-tanned cheeks where it touched them. As the chequered mantle fell back from his shoulders and he blazed out from under the branches into the sunlight once more, Father Mostyn awoke suddenly from his musing to the awareness of a strange presence, encompassing it with the meshes of an inquiring eye. Before the Spawer could extricate his glance from the toils of its inadvertent trespass, the dread

"Ha!" had completed his enslavement and brought him up on his heel sideways at the moment of passing.

"... A stranger within our gates!" Father Mostyn observed, with courteous surprise, rocking ruminatively to and fro on his legs in the roadway, and dangling the ebony staff in both palms. He drew a comprehensive circle with its ferrule in the blue sky. "You bring glorious weather," he said, contemplating the demarcated area through rapt, narrowed lashes, and sensing its beneficence with the uplifted nostrils of zest.

The Spawer unlocked his lips to a frank, boyish smile that lit up his face in quick response like the throwing open of shutters to the sunlight. Also, just a little emanative twinkle that seemed to suggest previous acquaintance with the Vicar over some Cliff Wrangham rail.

"To be truthful," he laughed, "it's the weather that brings me. One feels it almost a sin, somehow, to let such a sun and sky go unenjoyed. The rain always comes soon enough."

"Not till we've prayed for it," Father Mostyn decided with prompt reassurance, making critical diagnosis of the sky above. "... Prayed for it properly," he hastened to explain. "Indiscriminate Ullbrig exhortation won't do any good—with a sky like that. You can't mistake it. The meteorological conditions point to prolonged set-fair." He dismissed the weather with a sudden expulsion of glance and put on his



"Fairly far—yes. I am fond of the country," the Spawer explained, with simple confession of fact, "and the sea."

"We have not much country to offer you hereabouts, I fear," Father Mostyn said, looking deprecatingly round it. "We have land." He leaned interrogatively on the proffered alternative. "If that's any good to you. A fine, heavy, obstinate clay like the rest of us. We are sweaters of the brow in these parts. We find it an excellent substitute for soap. All our life is given over to the land. We are born on it, brought up on it, buried in it. We worship it. It is the only god we bow to. Notice the back of an Ullbrig man; it is bent with devotion to the soil. We don't bend like that in church. To bend like that in church is idolatry. So we go to chapel and unbend instead, and hold mighty tea-meetings in honour of Jehovah. Notice our eyes too; take stock of them when we give you 'Good day' in the road. There is a peculiar, foxy, narrow-grooved slant in them through incessant following of the furrow. You can't mistake it. You don't need any pretensions to metoposcopy to read our faces. We are of the earth, earthy. When we turn our eyes towards Heaven, we are merely looking for rain. If we turn them up again, we are merely looking for the rain to stop. Our lives are elemental and our pleasures few. To speak ill of one's neighbour, to slander the vicar, to deride the Church, to perpetuate heresy, to pasture untruths—*spargere voces in vulgum ambiguas*—to fly off at a tangent on strong beer—these are among our catalogue of homely recreations.

"If you were staying here to study us for any length of time—but I suppose you are the mere sojourner of a day, gone from us again in the cool of the evening with the night-moths and other flitting things?"

The Spawer laughed lightly.

"Not quite so soon as that," he said. "And you make me glad of it. No; I am pitching my tent in this pleasant wilderness awhile."

Father Mostyn opened his roomy eye to the reception of surprise.

"Ha! Is it possible? Within measurable distance of us?"

"At Cliff Wrangham."

"Cliff Wrangham!" The ecclesiastical eyebrows elevated themselves up out of sight under Father Mostyn's cap-rim. "So near and yet so far! Friends?" he added, as the eyebrows came down, casting over the word a delicate interrogative haze.

The Spawer cleaved its meaning.

"I am making them," he said. "At present I am merely a lodger."

"Merely a lodger," Father Mostyn repeated, using the words to nod over, as was his wont. "And Mrs. Dixon, I suppose, is our landlady? Ha! I thought so. She has the monopoly hereabouts. A tower of nonconformity in a district pillared with dissent—but a skilled cook. A cook for an abbot's board. Only describe what a dish smells like and she will come within reasonable approach of its taste on the table. You won't have much fault to find with the meals—I've tried 'em. Her chicken-pies are a speciality. There's not a single crumb of vice in the whole crust, and the gravy glues your lips together with goodness. The pity is they are not even Protestant pies, and are impiously partaken of on Fridays and other holy fast days. You need never fear for a dinner. All you have to do is to go out into the yard and point your finger at it. We possess an agreeable knack of spiriting poultry under the crust hereabouts without unnecessary formula. It is inherited. Beef will give you trouble, and mutton; both in the buying and the masticating. We kill once a week. Killing day falls the day after you want steak in a hurry—or has fallen some days before. That is because we sell first and slaughter second. Our Ullbrig butchers leave nothing to chance. They keep a beast ready in the stall, and as soon as the last steak's sold by

Better still, see that you get it, and never mind about asking. Ullbrig knows nothing of the terrors of ptomaine, or the lurking danger in sunlighted lobster—therefore is not afraid. Lobster from under the counter is as harmless as doves . . . unless it was just dodged there from the window when they saw you coming. Fussitter's wouldn't do that, that I know of; of course, they'd only do what I don't know of; but I think we may trust them. All the same, it is wise to examine the label before paying anything, as a matter of form. You'll soon see whether the sun's faded it at all, and you can feel if the tin's cold. Don't take a warm tin or a faded label on any account, and don't accept a tin with too much of the label torn off. Ask for another, and if they haven't one, go out of the shop on principle; even if it's Friday, and you've nothing else for dinner."

"Wouldn't one of Mrs. Dixon's pies come in rather handy here?" the Spawer suggested.

"Ha!" said Father Mostyn, with a luminous eye. "I see you realise the danger of them. The sin that comes in handy. That's it! That we may have strength of grace to turn away from the sin that comes in handy! Any day but Friday you'll find the tinned tongues and veal and hammers very good at Fussitter's too. They keep everything in the grocery line. You won't beat the quality in Hunmouth itself. But don't put your trust in our Ullbrig pumps; we have a little habit of priming them from the slop-pail when they run dry. Our credulity is not easily imposed upon with town stories of typhoidal germs in water. We know better than that. We judge by the bubbles. When water bubbles in the glass as water bubbles here, we point our finger to it with pride, for then we know people can't die from it. If they do it must be from something else. Bubbles are a glorious test! All the same, I would recommend you to buy your water aerated in bottles. Use the other for your tub." Father Mostyn's eye narrowed suddenly and lost itself in mists of distant afterthought. "And if," he said, "your soul cleaves to the good old stubborn British bull-dog sponge-tub, you will have been well advised to bring your own."

The Spawer threw out an amused smile of corroboration.

"It is under the bed," he said.

"Under the bed! Admirable! Sponge-tubs are not fashionable in Ullbrig. We base our objection to them on scientific grounds. We find they arrest the action of the perspiratory glands. I see you've come well

prepared. Your tent has been pitched in the wilderness before?"

"Many times."

Father Mostyn made expressive comment with his eyebrows.

"Ha! I thought so. A misanthrope?" he asked, in genial unbelief. "Shunning company for solitude!"

"On the contrary, I find solitude excellent company at times."

"Excellent company at times. Let's see. 'Numquam se minus otiosum esse quam cum otiosus, nec minus solum quam cum solus esset.' Is that it?"

The company from the Cliff End laughed.

"I could say better if I had my 'De Officiis' here," he said.

Father Mostyn slanted upward to inquiry from the accepted quotation.

"A literary man?" he inquired.

"No." The Spawer parted pleasantly with the word, unattached to any further token of enlightenment.

"A visitor at large, I suppose!" Father Mostyn substituted, holding the conclusion under his nose with the delicate non-insistence of a collecting plate in church. "Here for rest and quiet."

The Spawer shook his head.

"Again, no," he answered. "Rest and quiet are for the

"But the eyes!" he said; and then, with a quick readjustment of vision: "At least . . . there can be no doubt. . . . An executant? You play?"

The Spawer sighed.

"Yes," he admitted, with smiling resignation. "I suppose I play."

"The piano, of course?" Father Mostyn conjectured, taking assent for granted. "Ha! . . ." His face melted in smiles, like golden butter, to rapt appreciation at the vista of glorious possibilities that the instrument conjured up before him. He lingered over the contemplation down a long-drawn, eloquent "M-m-m-m," gazing out upon the infinite plains of melody with a brightened eye. "You are not relying on our aboriginal stone-age pianos, of course," he said, recalling his eye to the actual, with a sudden recollective jerk.

The Spawer showed a sunny glint of teeth.

"Hardly," he replied. "As soon as the railway people remember where they saw it last, I hope to have one of my own."

"One of your own. Ha!" Father Mostyn's eye glistened to enthusiasm again. "I judged so. Beautiful! Beautiful!" The ebony staff shook to internal humour at a thought. "Fancy Mozart on an Ullbrig piano! . . or Bach! . . or Beethoven! . . ." He wagged the unspeakable with his head. "Ullbrig knows nothing of them. It has no musical anxieties. If you mentioned their names it would think they were some sort of Russian barley or guano, or a new chemical manure. We are dead to melody. What we like is rhythm—something we can play on the church wall with our boot-heels. Notice us when we whistle; we don't whistle notes—we whistle time. Tune and pitch enter as little into our consideration as the precession of the equinoxes. The drum's the thing. After that, give us something worked by steam-power. The calliope at the Crystal Palace would just about begin to realise our musical aspirations—with steam drum attachment. The piano's only a makeshift. We acquire it for purposes of pride, so that our neighbours may come and covet the glass insulators, and go away speaking ill of us. It is good to be envied. I'm afraid you won't find any music hereabouts."

"Thank Heaven!" the Spawer breathed devoutly. "I was afraid perhaps I might!"

"Ha!" Father Mostyn caught quickly at the inference

and translated it. "I see; I see. A musical monastic! Coming into retreat at Cliff Wrangham to subject his soul to a course of artistic purification and strengthening!"

The Spawer accepted the illustration with a modest laugh.

"Well, yes," he said. "I suppose that's it—only it's rather more beautiful in idea than in actuality. I should have said myself, perhaps, that I'd come into the country to be able to work in shirt-sleeves and loosened braces, and go about unshaved, in baggy-kneed trousers, without fear of friends. I'm half a monastic and half refugee. In towns so many of us are making music that one never gets a chance to hear or think one's own; one's ears are full of other people's. So I've run away with my own little musical bone to a quiet place, where I can tackle it all to myself and growl over the business to my heart's content without any temptation to drop it for unsubstantial shadows. Instead of having to work in a stuffy room, with all the doors and windows closed and somebody knocking at you on the next house wall, I have the sea, the cliff, the sands . . . and the whole sky above me for my workshop. It will take me all my time to fill it. If a melody comes my way, I can hum it into shape without causing unpleasant remarks. Nobody ever hears me, for one thing; and for another, they wouldn't bother to listen if they did."

Father Mostyn's glance flickered imperceptibly for a moment, and then burned with an exceeding steady light. "I can

have thought, though," Father Mostyn went on, "that you would have sought to feed your muse on richer fare than turnip-fields. I imagined that mountains and valleys, with castles looking over lakes and waterfalls by moonlight, were more the sort of stuff for stimulating a musician's fancy. Is it possible there can be music lying latent in our Ullbrig soil?"

The Spawer smiled a sympathetic appreciation of his perplexity.

"I think there may be," he told him. "Anyhow, I have come to make the experiment, and I'm very well satisfied with it so far."

"Heaven be with you," Father Mostyn prayed with fervour. "It passes the mind of man to imagine the conversion of friend Joseph Tankard into a symphony, or friend Sheppardman Stevens as a figure in a sonata. You have your labour."

"I am not dismayed," the Spawer laughed, with light-hearted confidence.

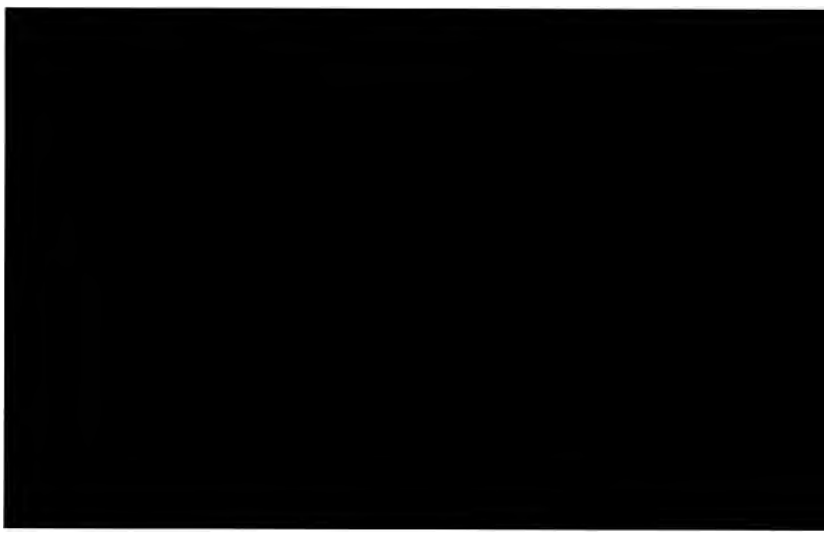
"And you are staying here for any length of time—a month, at least, to start with? . . . I would suggest three, if you wish to study the district."

"It might very well be three before I leave; certainly not less than a month."

"Excellent! Your soul is my cure while you stay. It will be my duty as parish priest to pay you parochial visits. I hope, too, that it will be my privilege to receive your full musical confession. And as soon as ever you grow tired of the company of solitude up at the Cliff End, just drop down to Ullbrig and try me for an antidote, any time you happen to be passing. If you're tired, or want something to drink, don't hesitate to make use of the parish priest. That's what he's for. Just call in at the Vicarage as you would at the Ullbrig Arms; you'll find the attention as good, and the welcome greater. After eight o'clock you can be almost sure of catching me . . . without there be sick calls. A pain in the umbilical vicinity is an excellent worker for the Church. Unfortunately, it passes off too soon, and then we are apt to forget that we called the vicar out of bed in a hurry one morning. . . ." The first stroke of three fell across his words from the church tower round the corner, and on the instant his genial eye was wreathed in priestly mysticism as with the spirals of incense. The mantle of a mighty mission descended upon him, and he gathered its folds in dignity about his being. "Ha!" he said, grasping his staff for departure, and verifying

the time from a handsome gold chronometer, ". . . I must leave you. They're waiting. . . . Priestly duties. . . ."

He did not specify who were waiting or what the priestly duties were, but exhaled the spirit of leave-taking in an ineffable smile without words, and vanished round Hesketh's corner—a vague, ecclesiastical vapour. A few moments later, by the time his Reverence could have comfortably reached the belfry, the creaking of a bell-rope overtook the Spawer on his way homeward, and the tongue of the stagnant hour-teller roused itself once more in public reproof of schism.



CHAPTER VI

A MILE and a half of roadway lies between Ullbrig and Cliff Wrangham. As near as may be it stretches straight to the halfway house, like a yard of yellow ribbon measured against the rod. From there the rest of it rolls away to the Cliff End in sweeping fold of disengaged material and the gateways set in. There are four of these, with a music all their own as they clash behind you, wagging their loose, worn, wooden tongues, that sometimes catch and are still with one short note, and sometimes reiterate themselves slowingly to sleep upon the gate-post behind you as you go. The first lets you by Stamway's long one-storey farm-house, before Stamway's three front windows, hermetically sealed, each darkened with a fuchsia and backed with white curtains drawn as tight as a drumhead, and Stamway's front door, an arm's length behind the wooden palisading, that Stamway has never gone in or come out by since he happened through with some of the parlour furniture thirty years ago—our front door, as Father Mostyn himself tells us, being no better than the church door for all the use we make of it. Beyond Stamway's third window is Stamway's big semi-circular duck-pond, where fleets of white duck-feathers ride upon its waters all day long, setting sail orderly, whole armadas of them, and executing marvellous naval manœuvres at every puff of wind, as to a precise command. This is the same pond where Barclay of Far Wrangham suffered shipwreck one night in November, being found water-logged up to his knees, and crying aloud (as it is attested):

"Lord 'ev mercy on me an' gie me strength ti keep my legs while tide gans down." Adding when rescued: "Ah nivver knowed sea so 'igh i' all my days, nor rise so sudden. She mun 'a done a deal o' damage, Stamway. If ah 'adn't been strongish o' my feet, like, ah sewd 'a been swep away, for sure."

"Nay," Stamway told him bluntly, who does not hold with dissipations in any shape or form, being a strict Good Templar himself, and never known the worse for liquor more than six times in the year. "It's Red Sea i'side of ye, ah think, 'at's most to blame. It's drowned a deal o' Phaarahs in its time.

Gan yer ways 'ome wi' ye, an' divn't say nowt about matter ti onnybody. They'll know very well wi'oot."

The second gate gives you your first foot on Dixon's land; and from here straight over the invisible third gate that the roadway holds wrapped away from sight till you have trodden its last loop underfoot, you get your first glimpse of Dixon's chimneys and the little end attic peering at you through the lattice work of leaves, and here and there blots of red roofing as the trees rock. The house stands endwise to the sea, set deep in a horse-shoe of trees; a big, hearty, whitewashed building under bronze red tiles, two stories high in front, that slope down backward over the dairy toward the stackgarth till they touch its high nettles. If you are approaching it with heelless boots and an apologetic tread, beware of the dog. The door opens under the low scullery roof, with the sink to your right hand as you go in, where the whole family takes turns at the *papier-mâché* basin before tea; and where the twins have washing competitions with soap and a piece of flannel for the cleanest neck, straining tiptoe on a soap-box —expedition, manipulation, and general all-round excellence scoring as points. Prize, one penny and downwards. The dairy — cool, dark, and tempting — with its great jars of cream and its dishes of piled eggs, is straight through here beyond the second door, looking dimly on to the fiery flame-

rule, they are prompt to do so, returning when recalled in the polite perspiration of conscientiousness very pleasing to witness. Such offenders as do not, however, can sometimes be made to hide their boots uncomfortably under the chair by an artistic use of floorcloth in their wake. Except Barclay, who says, with an affability that knows no shame:

"Nay, let be, lass. What's use o' doin' owt tiv it yet awhile? Ah s'll 'ave to gan back, thee knows."

The kitchen takes up the whole end of the house, facing two ways. The first window watches the lane across the red tile path and the little unclassified garden; the second comes on the broadside front of the house, facing south, where the sun is a gorgeous nuisance after mid-morning in summer, fading all the flowers on the figured print blind drawn down against his intrusion. It is one of six that look out upon the little green lawn of ragged grass, where invisible hens are desperately busy under its long blades all day long, and chase the moths with vehement beaks above the tangle at even. A rude rail fence bounds it in front, that gives way at times when you dangle both legs on it, and tints your trousers with a rich, powdery, green bloom where it darkens under the trees by the orchard corner. Beyond this, dipping below the sunk stone wall and the dry nettle-grown ditch in which the ball buries itself instinctively whenever you hit it, is the big grass field for cricket, with the wickets always standing. And beyond this, sweeping away in every direction to right and left, go the great lagoons of corn, brimming up to their green confines, and Barclay's farm shimmering on the distant cliff hill against the sky-line; and the dim Garthston windmill turning its listless sails over in dreamy soliloquy across three miles of fattening grain and green hedge and buttercupped pasture, with the cry of cattle and the chorus of birds, and the hum of wings and the fiddling of hidden grasshoppers; and the celestial sound of the sea, two fields off, lipping the lonely shore, and the basin of blue sky above, with a burning round sun for trade mark; and the stirring of lazy leaves, the cluck of poultry, the soothing grunt of distant pigs, outstretched on the pungent straw and intoxicated with content, the solaceful shutting of unseen gates, and all the thousand things and doings, and sounds and sights and scents that lie expressed in the words Cliff Wrangham and Dixon's by the sea.

And here the Spawer came in the early days of July, big with musical enthusiasm and the themes for his second concerto.

CHAPTER VII

THEY made the two end windows over to him, adjoining the orchard; the best sitting-room—that is not even used by the family on Sundays—with the best bedroom above; and he was very happy indeed. The diminutive front door, all out of plumb under its three drunken panes of different coloured glass, and buried a yard deep behind its porch of flowering tea, cut him off figuratively from the rest of the house; and the little staircase, starting straight upward for the square yard of bedroom landing from the sunk mat, cut him off in effect. Its tread is so steep and so unwonted that it put him in mind of augmented seconds whenever he went up or down, and the first step gives the door so little turning space that you have to mount your foot upon it and twist round, with the sneck in your stomach, to get into the Spawer's room. A little faded, old-world, out-of-the-world room, like a faint last century sigh, dear to the Spawer's heart on the first day; doubly dear on the second. The dearest little room in all the world, perhaps,

in pastry, with the little brass bell to his right hand, that gives forth a faint, far, meadow-tinkle when he swings it. Whereupon the twins, who have been waiting for the sound of it all the time, under orders, barely a nose-width out of sight round the corner, take up its expiring message with a business-like scuffle of boots and run loudly to the kitchen in double harness, shouting as they go: "Mek 'aste wi' ye an' all. Bell's gone."

By the left wall, abacking the staircase, the two-headed horse-hair sofa, consecrate to Dixon, beneath the framed print of the Ponte dei Sospiri and the twin china shepherds staring hard at the mantelpiece off their Swiss brackets; where Dixon fills his pipe at night when the Spawer's work is over, and puts a cheery retainer on the conversation with his familiar:

"Noo then . . . ah'll tell ye."

And tells him in a confidential whisper, after a look at the door:

"They say Lunnon's a rum place!"

Or, "Ah've 'eard tell o' some queer goings on i' towns!"

Or, "Ye'll 'a seed a deal o' strange sights i' France, ah's think!"

And goes to bed slapping his knees and saying: "Well, ah don't know!" till Mrs. Dixon tells him, "Now, you've been talking your nonsense again," knowing well the tokens.

And for the rest, dispersed indiscriminately about the room, there are Daudet's "Jack"; Tolstoi's "Sonate à Kreutzer"; half-a-dozen old leather-bound volumes of Molière, opening of themselves at "Le Bourgeois," "Le Malade," or "L'Avare"; Turgenieff twice over in French yellow; Swinburne's "Songs before Sunrise"; a litter of Brahms in his granite Simrock livery; of Grieg in pale pink Peters; of red brick Chopin; of Bülow's Beethoven; of Tschaikowsky; of Rachmaninov; of Glazounow; of Balakirev—of Young Russia, in a word; of Hans Huber; of Smetana; of Dvorak; of loose MSS. and blank music paper—all strewing the chairs and sofa and table in ideal confusion, so that before the Spawer may sit down on one seat he must mortgage another. A letter-weight bust of Chopin on the round antimacassared table by the window; by its side a signed Paderewski; on the mantelpiece the genial Bohemian 'cellist, piercing the soul of the little room with his glowing eyes from under the well-known silvery nimbus, and apostrophising his "dear young friend," Maurice Ethelbert Wynne, in neatest English through copper-plate German characters; Sarasate on the sideboard

by the big cupboard undermining the staircase, where the Spawer's table-bass goes off in heat apoplexy, a bottle a day.

Elsewhere of literary features a few; of singers, of artists, of actors even. Lastly, after an octave of days, comes the piano too, and takes up the far angle by the window corner, its treble truss touching the steel fender, its bass abutting the sill.

And the Spawer sets to work in earnest.

CHAPTER VIII

Not the Spawer of hitherto. No longer the smooth-browed son of leisure, with laughter held lazily captive in the meshes of his moustache and an unencumbered eye for the clear draughts of gladness, but a purposeful demon with conspiring brows and deadly-looking hands clawing the keys with a sinuous throttle in each finger, that draw forth a pencil murderously from time to time, like a stiletto, to stab thought upon the paper with the unpleasant despatch of assassination.

A pause for the day's dip and dinner, and on again; and a pause for a stroll and tea, and on again; and supper and a chat with Dixon, and on again. Till Dixon slaps his thigh when he comes back from anywhere and hears it all in full progression, and asks:

"What! Is 'e still agate (on the go)?"

Pushing his hat from his brow to reply:

"Mah wod (word)! It's a caution, yon!"

For a second octave of days.

And then a strange happening, to check the buoyant current of the Spawer's activity.

Very late one night the shadow of his head lingered upon the figured print blind, drawn loosely down over the wide-opened window, and the piano poured its unceasing treasury into night's immeasurable coffers. Already, in the long musical decade since Dixon's departure, he had risen to readjust the smouldering wicks, and gone back to a new lease of light at the keyboard. The light was failing for the second time as his fingers, slowing dreamily, sought the final shelter of Chopin. By many winding ways they came at length to the hushed haven of the seventeenth prelude, with the muffled A-flat bell booming its solemn death-message over the waters, and the little tear-laden boat of melody cradling its grief to silence on the ripples below.

The bell tolled no more; the little boat lay tremulous upon the echoes, and in the lingering stillness that followed, before yet the player's fingers had dared to break that sacred communion with the keys, fell all abruptly a sudden human sob.

A sudden human sob out of the darkness beyond the blind. So near and real and necessitous that the Spawer's elbows kicked backward from the keys, and the pedals went off like triggers under his feet as he spun round to the window. And yet, so far, so remote in probability, so unbelievably true, that even while he turned, with all its precise pitch, tone, outline, and duration developed phonographically on his mind by memory, in manner of musical dry-plate, he found far easier to account for it as some acute, psychical manifestation of his own emotions, rather than the expression of any agency from without. Through faith in this feeling, and no fear of it, he flung up the blind abruptly, and thrust forth his head to the test of a peremptory "Who's there?"

Outside, the world lay wrapped in a great breathing stillness. Night's ultramarine bosom was ablaze with starry chain of mail. From the far fields came faint immaterial sounds, commingled in the suspended fragrance of hay, in warm revelations of ripening corn, in the aromatic pungency of nettles, and all the humid suffocation of herbs that open their moist pores at even. Distant sheep, cropping in ghost-like procession across misty, dew-laden clover, contributed now and again their strange, cutting, human cough. Came, as the Spawer listened, the slow, muffled thud-thud of some horse's hoofs on the turf, as it plodded in patient change of pasture, and the deep blowing of kine along the hedge-bottoms. But

Even the sea itself raised its supplicative song a little louder, he thought, as he listened, and called "Come!" The night was too full of blessings to be suffocated untimely beneath the blankets; all his senses were making outcry for its bounty, and the soul of him hearkened. Just one stroll to the edge of the water and back before bed. It was no new thing for him to do. He reached his hat from its insecure slant upon the pile of music topping the piano, and clasped the sill with both hands for descent.

As he did so, in the still pause presaging the act, he heard the frenetic tugging of someone at the sticky orchard gate, that takes six pulls to open and three and a kick to close, ever since Jabe Stevens painted it drab, with black latch pickings. He heard the quick repeated pant of the pulls; felt in a flash the desperate occasion that was urging them; felt the very prayers surging about him on their way from a soul in turbulent tussle against destiny, and next moment was down on his feet before the window with a clear, arrestive "Hello!"

The click of the liberated latch; garments in swift full stir; a prolonged rending, like the descent of some four-octave chromatic, and a sudden breath-held, death-like stillness fell upon his landing. For a moment he could elucidate nothing by the look. Sight was sealed up in yellow lamplight. Two steps forward and the bondage was burst. He made out the line of flat wood stakes bounding the orchard to its half width, whence rough green rails complete the demarcation; and the gate, thrown three quarters open; and by it, struck in fugitive stoop to stone, the dim, motionless figure of a girl.

CHAPTER IX

ALL that had been silence before was swallowed up at a gulp in the sudden deeps of discovery. The Spawer, with legs planted forcefully apart, chin thrown forward, and sidelong listening ear, tugged at the tawny end of his moustache as a bell-rope in summons of assistance to his perplexity, seeking to elucidate some leading note of sound or sight for key to the occasion. For it is not altogether a child's task, whatever may be thought to the contrary, to address discreetly a panting feminine figure in the darkness at five paces, that has drawn the undesirable fire of our attention nearing midnight, and may be either a common garden thief or a despicable hen-roost robber; or a farm wench, deflected by the piano on her way home, and sobbing in sudden spasm of penitence for the recall of nocturnal favours to her swain; or a mere tramp, bungling the matter of a free straw bed, and in trouble because appearances are against her; or none of these things at all, but something quite other, utterly beyond the scope of divination. And since it is neither generous to approach distress through

up silence with a reassuring swing of heel, though without advancing.

"I'm sorry if I frightened you," he said, in an open voice, devoid of any metallic spur of challenge or odious trappings of suspicion. "I didn't mean to do that. . . . But . . ." He paused there for a moment, with the conjunction trailing off in an agreeable tag of stars for the girl's use, and then, when she caught her breath over a troubled underlip, took it up himself. ". . . We're not accustomed to callers quite so late . . . and I came out in a bit of a hurry. Is there anything I can do for you?"

Beautiful question of solicitude for a guilty conscience, that he smiled over grimly as he said it, to a diabolical rubbing of mental palms. He knew well enough that the very utmost he could have done for her would have been to keep the other side of the sill till she made good her escape. And he knew, too, that some part of her must have suffered tear by a couple of yards or so, but that was a matter might very well wait over awhile. For the present, all he wanted was a little enlightenment; later, the floodgates of compassion could be liberally loosened if required. He despatched his words, and dipped a hand into his trouser's pocket, making a friendly jingle of keys and coppers. The unperemptory tone of his voice, the kindness of the undiminished distance he kept, and this last show of leisurely dispassion did their work and raised the girl's head.

"Oh, I'm sorry . . . and ashamed!" she gulped, battling forth into the open through a threatening tumult of tears. "It's all my fault . . . every bit of it. I ought never to have come." She stopped momentarily, midway through her words, gripping on to fortitude in silence as to a hand-rail, till the big looming sob had gone by. ". . . So close. And I oughtn't to have come . . . at all, I know. But it's too late now. Wishes won't do any good. Oh . . . forgive me, please."

Her voice, even in the listening stillness of leaves, was almost inaudible, but there was the rare mellow sweetness of blown pipes about it such as the Spawer had not been prepared to hear at this time, and in this place. The musical ear of him opened swiftly wide to its magic like a casement to some fore-running spring breeze; and his heart stirred on a sudden to wakefulness—keen bird with a most watchful eye. Whatever else, it were absurd to couple vulgar delinquencies with so soft a mouthpiece. He flung the lurking idea afar, and a delightful flame of wonder grew up within him, illuminating possibility.

"Certainly," he said, in answer to her petition, striving to lull the girl's alarms with his manner of easy consequence. "I'll do my best. But tell me first what for."

"For . . . for what I've done," said the girl unsteadily, each word trembling with a tear. "I didn't mean—to disturb you. I ought to have spoken—when you called—first of all. But I couldn't—somehow—and I never expected you—by the window. I thought—perhaps—the door. And I feel so mean—and miserable—and wretched. . . ." Her voice suddenly went from her to an interminable distance, falling faintly afar like the unreal voice that wanders aimlessly about the slopes of slumber. "And oh, please—will you give me a glass of water?"

With that, and a residuary shaky sigh out of her little store of breath left over, her head fell limply forward. There was no mistaking this last tell-tale token of physical extremity; and he was by her side in a moment.

"Hello!" he called on the way, encouraging her by voice to resolution, till he reached her, "what a great iron-shod beast I am, jumping out and scaring you in this fashion. I deserve to be shot at sight. Hold up a little. You're not going to give up the ghost on my account, surely!"

She made a futile effort to move her lips for reply, and lifted

Cain I've been calling myself during these last few moments. There! . . . Do you think you can stand all right?"

He loosened the clasp of his arms for a moment, and she swayed out impotently in their widening circle.

"I think so," she said, giving desperate lie to proof positive under the strenuousness of desire.

He laughed indulgently, and caught her in again.

"Capital!" he said, "if only you were trying to sit down. But you mustn't sit down here. See." He took a tighter hold of her. ". . . If I help you—so. . . . Do you think you can manage to the door? It's only a step."

He urged her into motion with a gentle insistence of arm, and set her the example of a leisurely foot forward. For the first time he felt the exercise of her power in resistance.

"Oh, no, no!" she told him, turning off the two little panting negatives in their sudden hot breath of shame, and stiffening at the suggestion of advance.

"No?" he queried, in audible surprise. "You're not equal to that? But you mustn't stay out here. You need to sit down and have something to pull you up." He brought the other arm about her in a twinkling. "Here, let me lift you," he said. "I've helped drunken men up three flights of stairs before to-day, fighting every bit of the way. I ought to be able to tackle you as far as the door!"

Before she could absorb the intention through his words he had got her begirt for the raising. The consciousness, coming upon her at such short notice, in company with the action itself, found her without preparation other than a gasp of blank amaze. Then her hand went out to stay him.

"Oh, let me!" she said, with a horrified desire to avert this fresh imposition upon his credulity or good-nature. "I can walk—very well. . . ."

She finished the petition in mid-air, with the spot she had stood on to begin it sweeping two yards behind her under the Spawer's advance, and the sound of his amused, wilful laughter just beneath her ears, as he waded with her through that odious short sea of lamplight to the black porch.

"There!" he said, to another note of laughter, lowering her carefully till her feet found the square slab of scoured stone, with the scraper set in it, and strove hastily to reassert themselves. "That's better than bartering in yes's and no's. Thank you for keeping so beautifully still and not kicking me; you could if you'd tried. So!"

He steered her down the narrow darkness of the porch,

with his hands protectively upon her elbows from behind, through a rustle of leaves and the springing of flexible branches. She went before him in meek atonement, without any words, like a lamb led to the slaughter. Only when his arm slid past her to throw open wide the door did she seem about to offer any furtherance of demur. But the dreadful publicity of burning wicks lay forward, and the still more dreadful publicity of his face lay behind against retreat, and she went dumbly round the door, and so into the room. He could feel the sudden shrinkage of her being as the full force of the episode surged back upon her in a vivid hot wave out of the lamplight, and was sorry. She would have dropped down, in the penitential meekness of submission, upon the triangle of chair that showed itself from beneath a litter of the Spawer's music immediately by the door as they entered, but his arm resisted the tell-tale bend of her body.

"No, no," he said, realising her desire for the penance of discomfort rather than the comfort of repose, and jerking the chair out of consideration, ". . . not there." He thrust the table far out into the room with a quick scream of its castors at being so rudely awakened, and pushed her gently into the gaping, wedge-like entrance to the sofa. "That's better," he said, with a great evidence of content, as she sank back upon it before solicitous pressure. "The cushions are hard, but the

measured out the drop to the exact length of the accented syllable, and the stopper clinked home under a soft, satisfied "So-o-o!" The syphon took up the word, seething it vigorously into the glass, and next moment his arm had spanned the table to an encouraging: "Here we are! Take a good pull of this while it fizzes."

A soft, tremulous hand, nut-brown to the wrist, stole out in timid obedience over the table, and in the momentary junction of their arms by the tumbler, the Spawer perceived his visitor for the first time.

If the mere sound of her voice had aroused his wonder, the sight of the girl's face added doubly to his surprise. A face as little to be looked for in this place and at this time, and under these conditions, as to make quest for orchids down some pit-mouth with pick and Davy lamp. He could not maintain the look long, for before satisfying his own inquiry he sought to establish the girl's confidence, but he noted the wide generous forehead, the big consuming eyes, burning deep in sorrowing self-reproach and giving him a moment's gaze over the uplifted tumbler; the dispassionate narrow nose, sprinkled about its bridge and between the brows with a pepper-castor helping of freckled candour; the small lips, parted submissively to the glass rim over two slips of milky teeth; the long, sleek cheeks; the slender, pear-shaped chin; the soft, supple neck of russet tan, spliced on to a gleaming shaft of ivory, where it dipped through her dress-collar to her bosom; the quick throbbing throat, and the burning lobes of red, like live cinders, in her hair.

As to the girl herself, her whence and where and whither, the Spawer could make no guess. She wore a shabby pale blue Tam-o'-Shanter, faded under innumerable suns, and washed out to many a shower, but on her head it appeared perfectly reputable and self-supporting, and identified itself with the girl's face so instantly and so completely that its weather-stain counted for preciousness, like the oaten tint of her skin. A storm-tried mackintosh-cape, looped over her arms and falling loosely down her back from the shoulders, and the print blouse, evidenced by her bust above the table and her sleeves, and the serviceable skirt of blue serge that the Spawer had caught sight of in the cleft between the table and sofa, completed the girl as revealed through her dress. Everything about her was for hard wear and tear, and had stood to the task. There was not a single button's worth of pretention in the whole of her attire; not a brooch at her throat, nor a bangle on either of her wrists

to plead for her station. She had dipped her nose meekly into the tumbler and was letting the sparkles play about her lips momentarily, with dropped eyelids; then the glass went down to the table, and her eyes opened wide upon the Spawer as though casting up the full column of her liabilities, resolved to shirk nothing. He saw the brave battle of arithmetic, and strove to charge and scatter the hostile figures besetting her.

"You don't drink," he said, with a voice of solicitude. "I haven't made it too weak for you? . . . Surely! I took great care—I might have been making it for myself. Or is there anything else you'd rather have?"

He found her soft voice entangled in his inquiry, and stopped.

". . . Ever so much," he drew up in time to hear. "But it's not that . . ." The frank lips were wrestling to pronounce sentence upon her crime, but they broke down in the task and transferred their self-imposed judgment to him. "I don't know what you must think of me . . ." she said.



CHAPTER X

THE Spawer laughed light-hearted indulgence upon the admission.

"To tell the truth," he said, "I hardly know what to think myself, so it's no use saying I do. I thought perhaps . . . poultry, first of all; but your voice doesn't sound a bit like poultry, and I'm sure you don't look it. And I don't think it was apples either, though you'd got the right gate for those. Besides, apples don't count . . . that way. I've gathered them myself at this time of night before now, and been hauled back over the wall by a leg. We don't think anything of that."

"It was the piano," she explained unsteadily, and for a moment the steadfast flames in her eyes flickered under irresolute lids.

"The piano?" The Spawer raised his voice on tiptoe of amused interrogation. "Heavens! you weren't going to try and take that away, were you? It took ten of us and a bottle of whisky to get it in, and threepence to Barclay's boy for sitting on the gate and telling us by clockwork 'Ye'll get stuck wi' 'er yet before ye're done,' and half-a-crown to the man that let the truss down upon my toes. Surely you weren't thinking of tackling an enterprise like that single-handed, were you?"

For the first time he drew forth the faint fore-glimmering of what the girl should be like in smiles; a sudden illuminated softening of the features, as when warm sunlight melts marble, that spread and passed in a moment.

"I was listening," she said.

"But that's a dreadful confession." His eyebrows went up in tragic surprise and his voice departed to the mock-horrified aloofness of a whisper. "Listeners never hear any good of themselves, you know, and never come to any." He slipped from the pseudo-serious with a sly laugh. "Tell me the worst," he begged. "How much did you hear?"

"Oh! I don't know. . . ." She searched his inquiry for a space with her luminous eyes, like a policeman flashing some doubtful dark corner under the lantern. "Only very little. Perhaps . . . perhaps I'd been half an hour."

The illuminating ray fell off the Spawer's face at the actual moment of response, but it flashed up again in time to see him drink a new draught of amicable surprise.

"Half an hour," he said, tasting the liquor round a wondering palate, "with the classics. Lord! you've been punished for your offence."

"But I wasn't by the window all the time," she made haste to reassure him. "I was standing in the lane . . . by the kitchen gate." And then, with the phial of confession in her fingers, she let it drain before him in dropped sentences. "And I didn't mean to come any nearer than that. All I wanted was the music. Only . . . when you played . . . what you played last . . ." Her voice stumbled a little with her here, but she picked up the falter with a quick, corrective tilt of the nose, and walked more wardedly down the path of speech, her eyelids lowered, like one who moves by spiritual impulse. "I felt . . . oh! I don't know how I felt—as though, somehow, somebody were beckoning me to the window, where the music was. And so I came. And then, when I'd got there, all of a sudden things came back upon me that I knew I'd known once . . . and forgotten. I saw my mother . . . as she was ever so many years ago, before she died, playing to me . . . and crying over the keys; and the old room—ever so plain—that I could hardly remember,



touching extreme treble and bass. Only an inactive tear or two on the girl's lashes marked the recent revolt, and the way to her eyes lay clear. He sent his words pleasantly out to them at once in friendly hazard. "You don't mean to say you're a neighbour of mine?" he suggested, smiling interested inquiry from his spread-eagle pinnacle by the piano, ". . . and I haven't known it all this time?" For who was this strange nocturnal visitant of his, with a soul for the sound of things? ". . . Or are you . . ."—the alternative came twinkling in time to join the previous inquiry under one note of interrogation—"just a . . . spawer, I think they call it, like me?"

The girl shook her head at the latter suggestion.

"It's my home here," she said.

"At Cliff Wrangham?" he asked, and brought his right leg over the left towards her, in attitude of increased attention.

"No-o."

She must have felt a sense of isolation in abiding by that one word; as though it were a gate snecking her off from the Spawer's friendly reach in conversation, for she passed through it almost immediately and added the specific correction: "At Ullbrig."

"Ah!" His internal eye was soaring over the Ullbrig of his remembrance in an endeavour to pounce upon stray points of association for the girl's identity. "I'm afraid," he said, "that I don't know my Ullbrig very well. It's a part of my education here that's been sadly neglected. But you weren't going to walk back there alone? To-night, I mean?"

She looked at him with mild surprise.

"Oh, yes," she told him.

"Jove!" he said. "Aren't you afraid?"

"Afraid?" She gathered the word dubiously off his lips. "What of?"

"Oh," he laughed. "Of nothing at all. That's what we're most afraid of, as a rule, isn't it? Of the dark, for instance."

She smiled, shaking her head.

"I'm not afraid of that," she said.

"Ah," he decided enviously, "you're no newspaper reader. That's plain." Then taking new stock of inquiry. "But we're not in the habit of passing by . . . at this time, are we?" he asked. "I thought all good people were between the blankets by nine in the country?"

A queer little flame of resolve began fighting for establishment

about her lips, like the flickers of a newly-lighted taper, that burnt up suddenly in speech.

"I wasn't . . . passing by," she said, the flame reddening her to candour.

"No?"

"I came . . . on purpose."

The Spawer's eyebrows ran up in a ruffle of surprise and friendly amusement.

"Not . . . to hear me?"

She clasped her teeth in repression upon her lower lip, and nodded her head.

"And you've actually trudged all the way out from Ullbrig?"

"It's nothing," she said apologetically.

"But at night!" he expostulated, in friendly concern.

"There was no other time . . ." she explained. "Besides . . . I thought— They said . . . it was only after supper."

"Only after supper?" echoed the Spawer. "What's that? Indigestion? Nightmare?"

"The music," she said.

"I see." He laughed, nodding his head sagaciously. "So they've got my time-table. And I thought I wasn't known of a soul! What an ostrich I've been!"

"Everybody knows of you," she said, in wonder he should think otherwise.



ɔd what'll be to pay for it all . . . when you get back?"
ɛ.
fringe of her lashes was raised while her eyes reconnoitred,
'opped again.
othing," she told him.
nd no questions asked?"
o."
ɔd nobody sitting up for you, ready to put the
on half an hour, and point a finger at it when you
?"
o-o. . . ." She twirled the tumbler jerkily between soft
ɔ and forefinger. "They think I'm in bed. And I
o," with a sudden resurrection of self-righteousness.
'"—the self-righteousness went under here—". . . when
were all asleep . . . I slipped out and came to Cliff
ham."
ɔ-o-o!" said the Spawer, spraying his comprehension
this time with the word, as though it were a shower-
o enlightenment. "That's the secret of things at last,
' His eyes were spinning on the girl like peg-tops in
ɔus amusement. "And I suppose I've got to guard it
ɔy life's blood?"
rateful face flashed thankfulness up at him for its relief
he necessity of appeal.
ere's the bond," said he. "Subscribe, and say done."
rew out an open palm of contract across the table, and
ɔall hand crept into it with the timorous, large-hearted
or an unfamiliar shelter. "And I'm afraid," he said
proachfully, "that you've torn your dress?"
h, no . . . a little." She made-believe to look at her
etween the table and sofa, and take stock of the damage
"It's nothing."
t the time," said the Spawer, "it sounded terrible
h. I hope it isn't as bad as the sound."
drew up what appeared to be the ruined remnants of a
tery, and held it above the table-edge for his scrutiny,
: "It doesn't matter," with a hopeful smile.
ɔt that's awful," he said distressfully.
's only an old skirt," she explained, making light of the
ɔt with true feminine instinct, lest perhaps he might
she had no better. "I can soon mend it."
ɔall I fetch you a needle and some cotton?" he asked,
enitential voice. "I have both upstairs."
girl's eyes made a quick clutch at the needle and

cotton, but her lips hung back meekly to a suggestion of pins, with some murmur about "trouble."

"Trouble!" said the Spawer.

He spun the word up in contemptuous disregard as though it were a shuttlecock, and slipped blithely up the little staircase. A second or so later, when she had heard him drop the matches and rake over the carpet for them with his finger-ends, and weave sundry spiderous tracks across the ceiling, he was down again triumphantly extending the objects of his quest.

All too quickly the girl whipped the serrated edges of serge together, while he watched her—with a busy back and forth of needle—snapped the thread round a determined small finger, shook the skirt into position, and rose (conscientiously sheathing the needle in the cotton bobbin), showing parted lips for gratitude and farewell. The latter, taking the Spawer somewhat by surprise, awakened all at once his dormant solicitude.

"But you're not going . . . now!" he said. The girl said softly, "If he pleased." "Why, you haven't half finished!" he exclaimed, pointing to the desolate tumbler, its contents untasted, with here and there a stray spiritless sparkle seeking the surface, hopeless of ever getting beyond. The girl looked remorsefully at the object of her neglect, and said, still more [illegible]

would make me feel sad. I mustn't keep you any longer now, I know, for I don't want you to get into trouble; but it's awfully good of you to have come, and believe me, I'm really grateful. If there's anything in music I can do for you, I want you to know that you've only to ask, and it shall be done for you with pleasure. Honest Injun. You won't forget, will you?"

The girl said she could never forget . . . his kindness.

"It's a promise, then?" said the Spawer, blinking oblivion of his kindness.

Again the little unseen breath blew across her features at the question, and to his surprise he could have almost sworn to tears upon her lashes when he looked up for affirmation in the girl's eyes. To cover any confusion that his words might have wrought, he put out a friendly hand for parting.

"All right," said he, in voice of cheerful agreement. "So *that's* settled," though a dozen questions were fighting for first place on his lips as he said it. The little brown hand stole for the second time into the shelter of his own with a solemnity that, at other moments, he could have laughed at, and a moment later the Spawer was left gazing at the orchard gate, thrown three-quarters open, as he had done in that first memorable moment, with the girl's soft footsteps merged every second more deceptively in the starry stillness of night.

CHAPTER XI

WHATEVER the Spawer might choose to say of himself for purposes of humour (not, I am afraid, an invariable pole-star to truth), he was no sluggard. By agreement, dated the first night of his arrival, Jeff Dixon was to get a penny a day for bringing up the bath-water and having him into it at seven in the morning. Something short of the hour Jeff would stumble up the little steep staircase, with his tongue out, behind a big bucket of cold water (the last of three drawn to get the full freshness of the pump), and anticipating a few minutes in his statement of the time, make preliminary clamour for the Spawer's acknowledgment before departing to fetch the hot. From which moment forth the Spawer was a marked man, whom no subterfuge or earthly ingenuity could save. Once, when the acknowledgment went to the crack under the door (where Jeff's mouth was), disguised as a snore of portly and autocratic demeanour—"Ay, bud ye wasn't snorin' when ah wor at bottom o' stairs," the relentless mouth decided; and after two more unsuccessful efforts to carry the ball of conviction

the Spawer's sill according to custom, and the Spawer
ed out of bed to let him in. Already Nature's symphony
n full swing—a mighty, crescive, spinning movement of
try, borne up to him on a whirr of indefatigable wings.
sun had cleared the cliff railings and was travelling
ly upward on an unimpeded course, though still the
and lay grey in the shadow beneath its glistening quilt
w, and every spider's web hung silver-weighted like a net
lrawn with treasure from the sea. He stayed by the
ow a space, and then let go the curtain with an amused
niscent laugh.

wonder who on earth she is?" he said.

: scooped up the bulky armful of music-sheets that con-
ed his present labours at the concerto, and went back to
with them. But though he made a determined desk of
:nees and spread the papers out with a business-like
tment of pages, the work prospered but poorly when it
: to the pencil. After a short spell of it he sat back in
with his hands locked under his neck and his elbows
ed on either side of his head like blinkers, staring abso-
y at the window (that grew fast in strength of sunlight
he fireplace facing the foot of the bed, with its two prize-
abels of lead tied up over the mantelpiece, blue-ribboned,
testifying to the quality of Dixon's great-grandfather's
Heaven knows how many years ago. For the events
st night were a too inviting vintage to be left uncorked
untasted, and it must be forgiven him that he let his lips
to the cup while the wonder-sparkles still played in it.
of this glowing wine of remembrance he attempted to win
the girl's face, and did not altogether succeed. He
imed certain shifting impressions of red lips exaggeratedly
d; of great round eyes burning out like the head-lamps
express; of multiplied freckles about the brows and nose,
might have been the mottles on a dab; of a startling
: throat beyond where the sun had dominion; of a
by blue Tam-o'-Shanter and a perfect midnight of hair—

"Noo then," he called under the door, when he had summoned the Spawer lustily by name, and hit the panel several resounding flat-handers (as specified in the agreement). "It's tonned (turned) seven o'clock, an' another gran', fine day for ye an' all. Arny's gotten ye some mushrooms—some right big uns an' some little conny (tiny) uns, a gret basket full oot o' big field. Will ye 'ev 'em for breakfast?"

"Will I?" The Spawer shot together the loose sheets gathered in attendance upon an idle muse, and tossed them dexterously on to the nearest chair, as though they were a pancake. "Ah, me bhoy! me bhoy!" he called out, in the rich, mellow brogue of one whose heart was on a sudden turned to sunlight. "That's me bhoy! me bhoy! Wull Oi have thim for breakfast, me bhoy, me bhoy?"

"Ay, will ye?" inquired the mouth behind the door-crack, keen to know whether there was appreciation to be shared or not.

"Ay, wull Oi?" echoed the voice of glowing fervour. "Wull Oi, bedad! me bhoy? Mushrooms, ye say! Is't me the bhoy for mushrooms! Arrah, thin, me bonny bhoy, is't me the bhoy for mushrooms!"

After a pause: "D'ye mean yes?" asked the mouth dubiously, and with meekness.

"Ah, phwat a boy it is to read the very sowl o' man an' shpake it! Yis's the word, bi the beard o' St. Pathrick, iv he

"An' 'ere's yer warm," bringing to view the steaming wooden pail, with as much reminiscence of milk about the water as we have to pay for by the gill in town. "An' 'ere's yer rale cold boilin'. 'Ow div ye fin' yersen this mornin'?"

"In bed," says the Spawer, "thanking you kindly, where I put myself last night."

"Noo then, noo then!" with that indulgent tone of grown-up wisdom which is the birthright of every baby in Ullbrig, and on which it practises its first lisp; "are ye agate o' that road already? Ye mun 'a got the steel i' bed wi' ye, ah think—ye seem strange an' sharp, ti-morn." He pulled the bath from its hiding under the bed, set the mats about it, and brought the pails over within reach. "Noo, it's all ready an' waitin', so ye 'adn't need to start shuttin' yer eyes. Let's see ye movin', an' ah'll be away."

The Spawer made a feeble shuffle of legs under the blankets, and smiled with the seraphic content of one who has done his duty.

"Nay, ah s'll want to see ye on end, an' all," Jeff said sternly, "before ah gan mi ways. Come noo, Mr. Wynne—one, two, three!"

Thus adjured, the Spawer found strength to raise his eyelids after a few moments of bland inertness under Jeff's regard, and turned out affably (with them down again) on to the pegged rug alongside.

"That's better," said Jeff, with conciliatory admiration.

"Is it?" the Spawer inquired sweetly, sitting down on the bedside to think over the matter, and rubbing form contemplatively into his hocks. "Oh! . . . Then get me the third razor from the right-hand side of the case, and I'll kill myself. Also the strop and the brush and jug and soap-tube. . . ."

"D'ye mean a shave?" asked Jeff, with some curiosity.

"Merely another name for it," the Spawer told him.

"What div ye want ti get shaved for?" Jeff persisted.

"Oh!" . . . The Spawer sifted a few replies under rapid survey, as though he were rolling a palmful of grain, and picked out one at random. ". . . For fun."

"Ah thought ye wasn't gannin' to shave no more while ye'd gotten that there piece o' yours written!"

"Whatever put that idea into your head?" asked the Spawer, in surprise.

"You," said Jeff, with forceful directness. "It was you telt me."

"I?"

This second interrogation caught Jeff beneath the ear like an underhand, and staggered his faith.

"Why, noo, ye know very well it was," he said, with righteous appeal.

"How wicked of me to tell such a story," the Spawer said warmly.

"Bud it weean't be a story if ye divn't shave an' all," Jeff pointed out quickly, with a diabolical desire to save the Spawer's credit.

"If I told a story the other day," said the Spawer resolutely, "I'm not going to slip out of it by telling another now. I said I'd shave this morning; and shave I will."

"Ah do believe you're gannin' after some young lady or other," Jeff declared, drawing by a quick inspiration the golden long straw of enlightenment out of all this chaff.

"How dare you," said the Spawer, rising from the bed in protest, "try to put such ideas into the head of an innocent young man, old enough to be your father. Hither with the razor at once," he commanded, "and let's shave your head."

But inside, out of sight behind all this laughter, he sent a knowing, sagacious glance to his soul.

"The young divil!" he said.

He shaved, like the Chinese executioners, with despatch; whistled blithely through his bath as though he were a linnet hung out in the sun, and was downstairs as soon as might be.

CHAPTER XII

MISS BATES was Dixon's orphan niece, whose case deserves all the pity you can afford to give it, as we shall see. Left quite alone in the world by the death of her father (who had no more thought for her future than to fall off his horse, head downwards, in the dark), she was most cruelly abducted by her wicked uncle to Cliff Wrangham (much against her will—and his own), and imprisoned there under the humiliating necessity of having to work like one of the family. Small surprise, then, that her blighted life was in constant conflict with Destiny, with Cliff Wrangham, Dixon's bread (on which she took revenge every time she had the baking of it), and doing anything she was bidden—this last being the chief thorn in her daily martyrdom of indignities. You must not call her the scullery-maid or the dairy-maid or the kitchen-maid, but rather, with the blood-right to give back word for word and go about her day's work grumbling, you must appoint her a place among the ranks of unhappy heroines—reduced, distressed, and down-trodden beneath the iron-shod heel of labour. She was, indeed, the persecuted damosel of mediæval romance, brought up to modern weight and size and standard —not the least of her many afflictions being that she was forcibly christened Mary Anne by heartless parents, while yet a helpless infant, and that nobody called her anything else. Her lips were full of prophetic utterances as to last straws; as to what certain people (not so very many miles away) would find for themselves one morning (not so very far ahead) when they got up and came downstairs, and said, "Where's somebody?" and never an answer, and no need to say then they were sorry, as if they hadn't been warned!

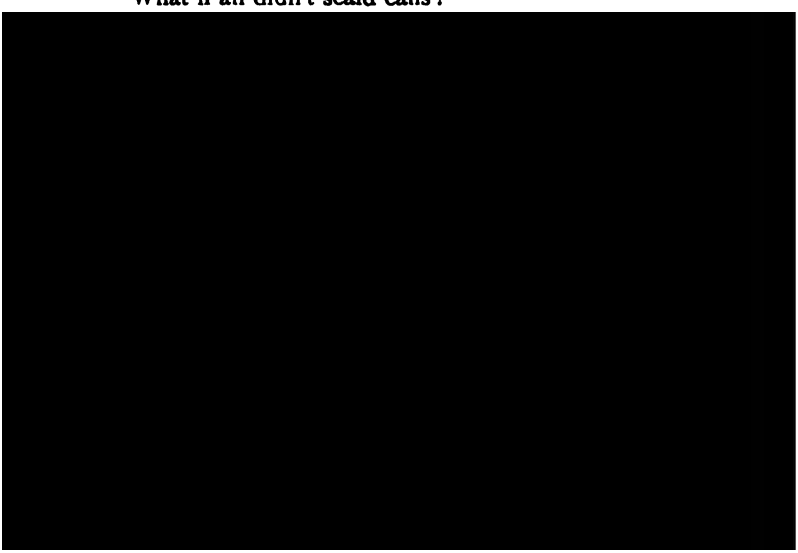
Up in the little rough-raftered bedroom over the scullery was her maidenly bower, looking on to the foldyard across the cow-shed roof through its one-paned eye, that punctuated the white-washed wall to an elbow's depth above the hanging sixpenny mirror and the toy washstand. Here Miss Bates would flutter on soft pinions to brood over her wrongs, and in the grey painted box by the door, with three

spectral skirts hanging down to it, inside out, from their wooden pegs, dip a furtive arm as far as the shoulder-blade to where her treasured library of books lay snugly ensconced beneath confidential articles of feminine apparel that have neither name nor existence for modest historians: "Maria Monk," cloth-bound edition; the "Dream Book," garlanded title, mostly referred to by daybreak; "Revelations of an Escaped Nun," very backless and *décolleté*; the "Language of Flowers"; and lastly, "Love, Courtship, and Marriage"; all of which would have been on the fire-back in two twos had Mrs. Dixon only so much as thought that they existed. On these Miss Bates fed her virgin fancy till her soul was so polarised to romance that it flew infallibly to its magnetism at whatever distance, like the needle to the north; oscillating wildly between the gentle extremes of elopement and amorous abduction. While, through the medium of the Spawer, romance agitated her maidenly composure at such close quarters that she snorted into his presence with uplifted nostrils like a whinnying war-horse, particularly when staggering under the burden of a new injury—what time she dumped her confidences unprefaced into his hearing as though she were discharging sacks of coal:

"Milk's gone sour noo."

"Ye can't do owt right for 'em."

"What if ah didn't scald cans!"



Miss Bates threw up her nostrils at this direct challenge of romance, and squirmed with such maidenly desire to insist her own claims through silence, that the tray in her left hand banged about her knees like distant thunder.

"Cliff Wrangham allus reckons ti count in wi' Oolbrig," she said, craftily extending the contested area to include her own pretensions, and tossing her head as though she were champing a bit.

"But leaving Cliff Wrangham out of the question," suggested the Spawer, in a voice of bland affability.

Miss Bates' knees stiffened to the struggle.

"Cliff Wrangham's Oolbrig an' Oolbrig's Cliff Wrangham 'ereabouts," she told him. "Ah nivver 'eard tell o' Cliff Wrangham bein' left out i' that road."

"Then let's leave it out now," said the Spawer, with cruel persistence, "for the first time."

"Ah see no ways o' doin' it," she declared, and down sank the subject between them once more, lead-weighted, like a shroud in the sea.

So the Spawer was left smiling over his cup in the old starting-price ignorance, knowing no more about the blue Tam-o'-Shanter than ever. He enjoyed his mushrooms very much, and went twice to coffee. Then, breakfast over, he crossed over to the piano, ran his hands over the keys, and set himself to his daily occupation without loss of time.

CHAPTER XIII

THICK saffron of sunlight filled the lungs of the little room to their uttermost capacity through the drawn blind. Every now and then it recharged them from the outer sunlight with a deep, recuperative breath, like a sleeper turning, and the lowermost octave of the piano blazed out in gold, played over by blood-red fingers. Down below the window-sash, about the shelterless roots of the rose-tree, moored along the wall line in barge-like flotilla and at anchor over the hard, sun-baked path, lay gathered the Spawer's faithful band of feathered friends, awaiting recurrence of the bounty so liberally bestowed upon them at meals. Each time the blind stirred they uprose in spires of expectant beak, whereat the Spawer, squinting sideways, would see the window space set with jewelled, vigilant eyes, while afloat on the wavy green border of grass beyond the pathway a snow-white convoy of ducklings drew their bills from beneath fleecy breasts and got under soft

After a moment, with fierce resumption of protest: "Mek a less noise, ye young sod. . . . Div ye want a bat an' all? . . . A smack, ah mean," in quick deference to the kitchen window, where a stern maternal voice (West Riding born and bred) was wont to lurk and pounce upon stray idioms of an Ullbrig dialect. Once, when the eyes of Lewis were convicted of trespass across the uncurtained gap by the Spawer himself, the conviction was parried hastily with a premature "Ah'm very well, thank ye. Div ye want me to bring letters to winder if there's onny?"

Reggie, with a sudden scared eye for consequences from the kitchen at this daring establishment of relations, scrambled actively to his feet and waded desperately away through the long grass, leaving the remark over his shoulder:

"Ah'm off ti pond."

Now and again the blind darkened to the crunch of footsteps, and there would be a typhoon among the poultry. Jeff went by with a basket to the orchard, while a little later Dixon—in receipt of special privilege—pushed the blind boldly aside with his head to a fragrant inlet of tobacco, and said, after a cheery survey round the apartment:

"Ye've gotten agate, then. . . . Noo, what'll they be doin' i' France ti-morn, think ye? Some rum things. *Ah'll* awander" (warrant).

After his departure, for an hour or more nothing but sunlight stirred the Spawer's blind. Then the voice of Lewis was heard in close proximity outside, upreared dizzily between high intimidation and tears, like an unsteady equilibrist on a tight-rope: "Eeh! ye mun't tek 'em. Let me tek 'em. 'E telt me ah'd to tek 'em. Ye divn't ought to tek 'em. It's me what ought to tek 'em. Ah want to tek 'em." The figure fell headlong off the tight-rope by the Spawer's door, was brushed aside to a bustle of obdurate stiff print and apparently trampled on, and the next moment the Spawer's first crop of Cliff Wrangham letters was extended to him in Miss Bates' gentle fist.

"Three letters, a post-card, an' a fortygraft," said Miss Bates, relaxing the proprietary clench of thumb (tightened recently for dominion over the downcast Lewis), and suffering the Spawer to gather them from her confiding hand with all the romantic symbolism of a bouquet. "It's good to be you an' 'ev letters sent ye wi'oot nobody pesterin' where they come fro'. Will there be onnything for post to tek back?"

"Let's see . . ." said the Spawer, skimming the post-card

more rapidly than Miss Bates had done before him. "Is he waiting?"

"It's not a 'e," Miss Bates replied, with no manifest relish of the fact. "An' she's stood at kitchen door. 'Appen she's waitin' to be asked twice to come in an' sit 'ersen down—bud she'll 'ave to wait. Once is good enough for most folk, an' it mun do for 'er."

The Spawer finished the post-card, tossing it on the table, and forced his fingers beneath the flap of the next envelope.

"What?" said he, with a smile of amused surprise. "Is the postman a lady, then?"

"Nay," repudiated Miss Bates, stripping the amusement off his surprise, and treating the question in grim earnest. "She'd onnly like to be. It'd suit 'er a deal better nor tramplin' about roads wi' a brown bag ower 'er back."

"It sounds charming enough," said the Spawer, throwing himself with a diabolical heartiness into the idea. "What sort of a postman is she?"

"No different fro' nobody else," Miss Bates gives grudgingly, "though she 'ods (holds) 'er chin where most folk's noses is. They gie 'er six shillin' a week for carryin' letters to Cliff Wrangham an' Far Wrangham an' round by Shippus—an' it mud be ten bi t' way she sets up."

"Six shillings a week," the Spawer mused wonderingly. "Just a shilling a day and be a good girl for nothing on

chance to get away. She mun gan 'er ways ti Far Wrangham, then."

The Spawer had opened the third envelope, and Miss Bates was blowing herself out in great gusts like a strenuous candle, fighting hard against extinction, when she heard herself suddenly recalled.

"After all," he said, "I'm going to be a woman and change my mind. Who writes quickly writes double, and saves two pages of apology. Then I can get back to work with a clear conscience."

"Ah'll tell 'er she's got to stop, then," said Miss Bates. "An' if ye'll ring bell when ye've finished, Lewis 'll let me know, an' ah'll come for letter. Ye needn't trouble to bring it."

She blew herself out to total extinction this time, and the Spawer, throwing a leg over the table-end, turned his attention to the letter in hand—a thin sheet of foreign note-paper, covered on three of its pages with a firm feminine handwriting. He read it very carefully and earnestly, his eyes running from end to end of the lines like setters in a turnip-field, as though they followed a scent, till they brought up to a standstill by the signature. Then he took up the photograph.

It was the face of a girl, and he studied it in such stillness and concentration that his eyelids, lowered motionless over the downward gaze, gave him the semblance of a sleeper. Without being beautiful, the face had beauty, but though he took all its features under individual scrutiny, it seemed less as though he were concerned with their intrinsic worth than that he was searching through them the answer to a hidden train of inquiry. Whether he came near it or not would be difficult to tell. The smile with which he looked up at last and dispersed the brooding cloud of concentration might have been purely recollective, and with nothing of the oracular about it; for it set him straightway to pen and ink and writing-paper, staying with him the while, and through the next few minutes the sound of his industry was never still. Not until well over on the fourth page did the pen stay behind in the ink-pot, as he sat back to review what was written. Then the pen was rapidly withdrawn again, to subscribe his name, and he addressed the letter:

"Miss Wemyss,
Luzernerhof,
Luzern,
Switzerland."

With this in his hand, and the big bath towel and red bathing drawers slung over his arm from their drying place on the hot sill, he made off down the baked pathway, whistling pleasantly like a new pied piper—a whole throng of feathered followers at his heels. By the wooden gate, where the red-tiled pump-walk makes junction with the front path at the kitchen end, Miss Bates waylaid him, holding out damp semi-wiped fingers, and saying an expectant "Thank ye."

"What for?" asked the Spawer, trying to dodge on either side of her ample bosom with an active eye for the kitchen door.

"For t' letter," said Miss Bates, unperturbed, "if ye've written it. Ah'll gie it to 'er as she gans back."

"Back where from?" inquired the Spawer, with a sudden thirst for information.

"Fro' Far Wrangham," Miss Bates told him, ". . . wi' letters for Barclay. Bud she'll call again on 'er way 'ome, an' ah'll see she teks it an' all, then."

"Thanks . . ." the Spawer decided on consideration, "but I think I'll see her myself. I want to ask about posts. . . ."

"There's nobbut one," Miss Bates interposed hurriedly, "an' it gans out at 'alf-past four."

"That's not the one I mean," the Spawer explained, and tacked on very quickly: "Which way does she come back?"



CHAPTER XIV

AND the face beneath it was the face he had been trying to remodel this morning, out of the obstinate stiff clays of remembrance. There were the dear, kissable, candid freckles, powdered in pure gold-dust about the bridge of the nose and the brows—each one a minstrel to truth; there were the great round eyes, shining smoothly, with the black-brown velvety softness of bulrushes; there were the rapt red lips, no longer baffling his gaze, but steadfast and discernible; there was the big beneficence of hair; the oaten-tinted cheeks, showing their soft surface-glint of golden down where the sunlight caught them; the little pink lobes; the tanned russet neck, so sleek and slim and supple, and the blue Tam-o'-Shanter topping all, as though it were a part of her, and had never moved since last the Spawer had looked upon it.

In every other respect she was the same girl that had sat in Dixon's place on the sofa last night. She wore still the simple skirt of blue serge, cut short above her ankles for freedom in walking (showing too, at close quarters, a cleverly-suppressed seam running down to the hem on the left side, like a zig-zag of lightning), and the plain print blouse, pale blue, with no pattern on it, ending at the throat in a neat white collar borrowed from the masculine mode, and tied with a little flame of red silk. Only the light rain-proof cape was wanting, but over her shoulders, in place of it, was slung the broad canvas belt of a post-bag that flapped bulkily against her right hip as she strode, with her right hand dipped out of sight into its capacious pocket. She came swinging along the hedge at a fine, healthy pace, as though the sun were but a harmless bright new penny, making rhythmic advance in a pair of stubborn little square-toed shoes, stoutly cobbled, with a pleasing redolence of Puritanism about their austere extremities; and so into the Spawer's presence, all unconscious and unprepared.

The sight of him, waiting over the gate, with his elbows ruling the top bar, his chin upon linked fingers, and a leisurely foot hoisted on to the second rail, broke the rhythm of her

step for an instant on a sudden tide of colour, and brought the hand out of the bag to readjust the shoulder-strap in a quick display of purpose. But she showed no frailties of embarrassment. She came along with simple self-possession to the greeting point, giving him her eyes there in a queer little indescribable sidelong look that a mere man might ponder over for a lifetime and never know the meaning of—a queer little indescribable, smileless, sidelong look, sent out under her lashes, that had nothing of fear or favour, or friendship or salutation, or embarrassment about it, but was pure, unmingled, ingenuous, feminine, stock-taking curiosity, as though she were studying him dispassionately from behind a loophole and calculating on his conduct with the most sublime, delicious indifference. The Spawer could have thrown up his head and laughed aloud at the look. Not in any spirit of ridicule—angels and ministers of grace defend us!—but with fine appreciative enjoyment, as one laughs for sheer pleasure at a beautiful piece of musical phrasing or an unexpected point of technique. If he had opened the gate with a grave mouth and let her through, not a doubt but she would have passed on without so much as the presumption of an eyelash upon their last night's relations, and never even looked back over a shoulder. But he stood and barred the way with his unyielding smile, and when she came up to him:

"Aren't you going to speak to me?" he asked meekly.

"I wanted badly to ask."

"But I daredn't."

"And I daredn't either. What a couple of cowards we've been. Let's be brave now, shall we, to make up for it? I'll ask and you shall tell me. Who are you?"

She dipped an almost affectionate hand into the post-bag, and extended it partly by way of presentation.

"I'm the post-girl," she said.

He looked at the bag, and then along the extended arm to her.

"Really?" he asked, visibly uncertain that the post-bag was not merely part of a pleasing masquerade, or that the girl might not have put herself voluntarily under its brown yoke for some purpose as inexplicable as the trudging to Cliff Wrangham by starlight.

"Really and truly," she said. "I know I ought to have told you . . . at first. But I thought, perhaps . . ." She plucked at a blade of grass, and biting it with her small, milk-white teeth, studied the bruised green rib with lowered eyes. ". . . Thought perhaps you'd taken me for somebody different. And I was frightened you might be offended when you knew who it was."

In the clear frankness of her confession, and the soft, inquiring fearlessness of eye with which she encountered his glance at its conclusion, there was no tincture of abasement. As she stood there by the gate, with the broad badge of servitude across her girl's breast, she seemed glorified for the moment into a living text, attesting eloquently that it is not toil that dishonours, and that the social differences in labour come but from the labourer. In such wise the Spawer interpreted her, and embraced the occasion for belief with an inward glad response.

"But why should I be offended at the truth?" said he at length, his eyes waltzing all round hers (that were vainly trying to bring them to a standstill) in lenient laughter. "And how on earth could I take you for somebody different," he asked, drawing the subject away from the awkward brink of their disparity, "when you're so unmistakably like yourself? Sakes alive! Nobody could mistake you."

She lowered eyes and voice together, and made with her fingers on the rail as though she were deciphering her words from some half-obliterated inscription in the wood.

"I want to tell you," she began, and the dear little golden freckles on her nose seemed to close in upon each other for

strength and comfort, "how very sorry I am . . . for what happened last night."

"You can't be sorrier than I am," the Spawer said. "It's been on my conscience ever since. I was a beast to jump out as I did, and I admit it."

"I don't mean you," the girl cut in, with quick correction.

"Who then?" asked the Spawer.

"Me . . ." said the girl. "You were as kind as could be. Nobody could have been kinder . . . under the circumstances . . . or helped me to be less ashamed of myself."

"Please not to make fun of the poor blind man," the Spawer begged her, ". . . for he can't see it, and it's wicked."

"Oh, but I mean it," said the girl. "I never got to sleep all last night for thinking of the music, and how badly I'd acted."

"To be sure," said the Spawer, "your acting wasn't altogether good. If, for instance, you hadn't mistaken your cue when I came out through the window, I should never have known you were there at all."

"Shouldn't you?" asked the girl, with the momentary blank face for an opportunity gorgeously lost.

"Indeed, I shouldn't."

"All the same . . . I'm glad you did," she said, with sudden



from his own shoulders. "Father Mostyn . . . you were saying?"

"Oh, yes! Father Mostyn's always warning us against being Ullbrig hypocrites. But it seems so hard to avoid." She sighed in spirit of hopelessness. "I seem to grow into an Ullbrig hypocrite in spite of everything."

"Never mind," said the Spawer consolatorily, casting a glance of admiration along the smooth, sleek cheek and neck. "It looks an excellent thing for the complexion."

"That?" The girl ran a careless hand where his eye had been without making any attempt to parry the compliment. "Oh, that's being out in the rain. Rain's a wonderful thing for the complexion. Father Mostyn says so. But it can't wash these away," she said, touching the little cluster of freckles with a wistful finger. "These are being out in the sun."

"I was looking at those too," said the Spawer frankly. "I rather like them."

"Do you?" asked the girl, plucking up at his appreciation. "Yes, some people do—but not those that have them. Father Mostyn says they're not actually a disfigurement, but they're given me to chasten my pride. He says whenever I'm tempted to look in the glass I shall always see these and remind myself, 'Yes, but my nose is freckled,' and that will save me from being vain. And it's funny, but it's quite true."

"You know Father Mostyn well, of course?" said the Spawer, his question not altogether void of a desire to learn how far this estimable ecclesiast might be discussed with safety.

"Oh!" The girl made the quick round mouth for admiration, and held up visible homage in her eyes. "Father Mostyn's the best friend I have in the world. He's taught me everything I know—it's my fault, not his, that I know so little—and done things for me, and given me things that all my gratitude can never, never repay. It was he allowed me to go round with the letters."

"That was very good of him," said the Spawer, with a tight mouth.

"Wasn't it?" the girl said, showing a little glow of recognisant enthusiasm. "At first uncle was rather frightened—frightened that I ought not to do it, but we all thought six shillings a lot of money to lose (that's what I get); and Father Mostyn said most certainly I was to have it."

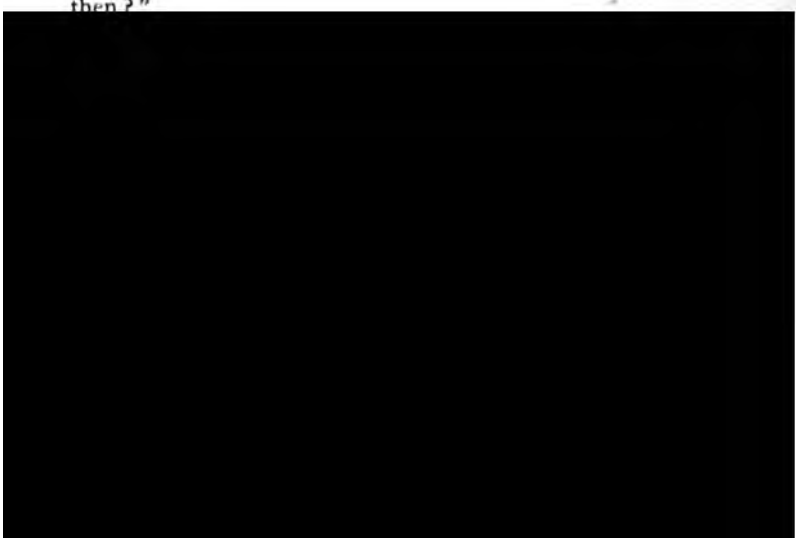
"And so he gave it," said the Spawer. "Jolly kind of him."

"Oh, no! he didn't give it," the girl corrected, after a momentary reference to the Spawer's face. "Government gives it . . . but he said I was to have it—and I have."

"And what did uncle say?" asked the Spawer amicably.

"Uncle? Oh, he said it was the will of Providence, and he hoped it would soon be ten; but it's not ten yet, and I don't think it will be for a long time. There were others who wanted the six shillings too, as badly as I did—and deserved it better, some of them, I think. At one time I felt so ashamed to be going about and taking the money that seemed to belong to such a number of people who said they had a right to it, that I asked to give the bag up; but uncle seemed so sad about it, and said it was flying in the face of Providence to give anything up that you'd once got hold of, and Father Mostyn said it was a special blessing of Heaven bestowed upon me (though I'm sure I don't know) . . . and so I kept it. It was a struggle at times, though—even though Father Mostyn used to walk with me all the way round by Shippus to keep up my courage. . . . And that reminds me," she said, showing sudden perception of responsibility, "I have to go that way this morning."

"What! haven't you got rid of all your letters yet, then?"



saddened, perhaps, at his readiness to assist the separation), when she found him by her side.

"But which way are you going?" she asked, for the sea lay now at their backs, and the Spawer, as was evident (and as we all know), had been going a-bathing.

"The same way as you are," he answered, "if you'll have me."

And when Miss Bates (who had been watching them all the time from the end attic window, with Jeff's sixpenny telescope stuck to one eye and a hand clapped over the other) saw this result of the girl's abominable scheming, she became very wroth indeed; filled to the brim and overflowing with righteous indignation that her sex could sink thus low. She snapped the telescope together so viciously that she thought she had cracked it, and when she found she hadn't she was wrother than ever as compensation for this false alarm, and almost wished she had.

"Ay, ye may set ye-sen up at 'im, ye gret, cat-eyed, frowsy-'eaded 'ussy!" she said, hurling the javelins of her anger at the blue Tam-o'-Shanter (everyone of which, so far as could be discernible at that distance, seemed to miss), "bud if ye think 'e'll be ta'en wi' yer daft, fond ways ye think wrong an' all. Ay, *you*, ah mean. Ah'd be sorry to set mysen i' onny man's road like yon, mah wod. Think shame o' ye-sen, ye graceless mynx. Ah know very well 'e's wantin' to be shut o' ye."

And after much further vehement exhortation to this effect, flung herself gustily down the staircase, slamming all the steps in descent, like March doors, and carried the full force of her indignation into the kitchen, where she swept it from end to end, as though she were a tidal wave.

"Out o' my road!" she cried at Lewis, innocently engaged in fishing the big dresser with a toasting-fork for what it might yield; and before he could stop spinning sufficiently to get a sight of his assailant (though he had no doubts who it was), was on him again: "Away wi' ye an' all."

And had him (still revolving) round the table.

"Let's be rid o' ye!"

And licked him up like a tongue of avenging flame by the big range.

"Div ye want to throw a body ower?"

And was ready for him by the door.

"Noo, kick me if ye dare."

And whipped him out through the scullery like a top, with a parting:

"Tek that an' all."

Which he took, like physic, as directed; and ten minutes later, seeing his mother emerge from the calf-house, and being in possession of ample breath for the purpose, put Miss Bates' injustice on record in a historic howl.

CHAPTER XV

At Hesketh's corner their steps, mutually lingering, were brought to a definite standstill by the girl, and the Spawer watched her resume that old familiar, swinging, healthy stride, till it took her from his view round the green bend into the village.

"So Father Mostyn's her natural protector," he mused, on his way back to Cliff Wrangham, strolling leisurely with the towel round his shoulders, ". . . and teaches her the piano, and is the very best friend she has in the world.

"To-night I must really call upon him. I've been treating his invitation rather shabbily.

"Funny! To think she remembered all the photographs and everything, and could tell me whereabouts I'd stuck Beethoven, though I'm hanged if I could remember myself.

"What a fascinating compound she is of emotion and matter-of-fact. And how on earth does she come to be mixed up with village post offices? And why doesn't she say 'tiv' and 'thruff' and 'rawd' and 'gannin' ti Oommuth'?

"I wonder who her mother was?

"And her father; she never mentioned him.

"Perhaps his Reverence will know all about it. I must coax the pump with a little priming, and work the handle assiduously.

"And Miss Bates is a pupil of mine, is she?—with a most delightful touch. Ye gods and little fishes!"

He was so shut up in the remote strong-room of reflection that for a while, with all his faculties converging inwards, the prolonged ringing of a cycle-bell made no more effect upon his consciousness than the futile hammering at a front door when all the servants are concentrated upon a funeral out of some window at the back. But eventually the sound bore in on his seclusion as a faint, far note heard through many thicknesses of bricks and mortar, which was being played persistently out of the key of Nature; and turning round on his heel to discover the culprit, found himself hailed genially from the roadway as a "rascal" by the Vicar of Ullbrig.

At first sight the Vicar appeared to be sitting aloft in serene contentment on a scrap heap. A second glance, however, showed the Spawer that this deceptive serenity pertained only to the upper half of him, and that, judging by the ceaseless churning of his legs, and the fact that the scrap heap seemed to be gaining ground, he decided rightly that this was a tricycle. It came along, shaking with palsy, and making asthmatic lamentation, like a paralytic bedstead out for the first time after convalescence—one of those huge oölitic monsters of locomotion (and last of its kind), with a big, back, scissors-grinding, driving wheel, worked by pugilistic connecting rods that looked as though they were perpetually squaring for a chance to knock somebody's head off, and meant doing it too, not a doubt, one of these days.

"Ha, you rascal!" called Father Mostyn, coming along at leisure, now that the chase was ended, with his hat in the brake hand and a bared, bright forehead held up this way and that to the beneficent blueness of heaven. He had the rusty black cassock unbuttoned to his midway and rolled about him like a carpenter's apron for liberty of action, being secured in front with a large double knot the size of a winter cabbage. ". . . Trying to slip away unobserved. But his reverence the vicar's the most difficult man to dodge in Ullbrig. Ask friend Sheppardman Stevens. All his reverence's

on Friday that they'd be sending for me from Sheppardman's —the weather being so hot, and his fortnight nearly up. This morning, of course, he's repenting very violently indeed—particularly in the epigastric regions, and has sent to ask if I'll go and take his dying confession. Dying confession is a specific in his case. You'd be surprised what a tremendous power of good it does him. I don't really think he could get better without one. Meanwhile, the family are trying to drive the enemy from his stronghold with hot bricks in flannel and tepid mustard-water, and telling Sheppardman for goodness' sake to hold his noise because his reverence the vicar's coming. Yes; the way of transgressors is hard."

He rubbed his haunches with ecclesiastical wisdom, and thrusting a proprietary nose into the blue sky, sniffed mightily of the illimitable blessings of Heaven, as though Heaven were a garden and he possessed it.

"Well," said he, taking stock of the Spawer's appreciation next moment through keen-drawn lashes. ". . . If I delay too long friend Sheppardman may be getting better without me, and that would be a bad precedent to establish against the Church Militant. So when are we to smoke the calumet together? 'Ad Kalendas Græcas?' Or are you going on dodging me till I come out and catch you here the next time our post comes back?"

The Spawer laughed the sunny, ambiguous laugh for humour of the insinuating sort.

"After that," he said, "perhaps you won't believe me—unless I speak untruth. But I was really making up my mind to come and disappoint you to-night when you overtook me. How will that do?"

"Ha! . . . Come and disappoint me to-night. Capital! capital! And I'll take the liberty of believing you when I see you. You know our office hours—any time from eight o'clock till sunrise. There's no closing act." He put on his hat. "How are they doing you at Dixon's?"

"Immensely."

"And the music?"

"Progresses."

"Ha! And the music progresses. Capital! Come and talk it over to-night. Come early. You are welcome. All seats free and no collection, as our brethren the Nonconformists say."

With that and the Spawer's assistance he urged the nose of his unwieldy metal beast in a huge circle towards Ullbrig,

and mounting upwards to the cushion-seated summit in the blue sky over passive elephantine pedals, while the Spawer stood saice at the back wheel, set off slowly down the road. His head, high above the turbulent commotion of his legs, and oblivious of them, kept turning sublimely from side to side, showing a serene pontifical profile, as though he bestowed blessings in passing on the corn.

And just beyond the halfway house the Spawer, happening to put a casual hand into his side pocket, drew it forth again as though it had been burnt, with a letter in it, and whistled and laughed.

"The deuce!" said he.

CHAPTER XVI

THE Vicarage stands under the church tower in the back street, within a stride of the lich-gate, and is as difficult to find (unless you know it) as Father Mostyn is difficult to miss. You can walk half-a-dozen times round Ullbrig, choosing a different house each time, and every one of them will be the wrong one. You will choose Hesketh's first of all, because the hedge looks so high and trim and sleek and snug and parsonic; and next you'll fix on the doctor's, because it's a gabled house with a mouldy drive that might be clerical, until you catch sight of the big brass plate on the gateway; and following the doctor's you'll turn your eyes to Greenland's (though you'd thought it too big before), and tell yourself that you felt somehow it was the Vicarage all along; and after Greenland's, perhaps you'll hark back again to Hesketh's, wishing the hedge didn't fit so well all over; and then, when you've tried to peep through every curtain in Ullbrig, you may be tempted to make the inquiry of one or other of the dozens of us that have been watching you all the time, knowing well you had a question to ask, and itching to be the one to answer it.

And if you ask it of a little squat man, with his face buried in yellow-grey beard and whiskers, who wears a Russian cap and squirts nicotine through a coffee-coloured moustache to either side of you, saying:

"Gan past Blue Bell an' ton (turn) sharp to yer right."

That's Shep Stevens. He knows as much about the Blue Bell as any two men in Ullbrig, and could tell you how many spittoons there are on the bar floor without counting them over his fingers.

And if you ask it of a younger man, with a brown beard, and a clasp rule sticking out of his trousers' pocket, who tells you modestly:

"Y'ought ti asked my feythur, 'e could 'a made it plainer to ye nor me. Ah misdoot ah s'll not instruct ye very well. Bud ah could show it ye wi' my finger if ye wouldn't mind me gannin' wi' ye a step or two i' my workin' claws (clothes)."

That's Jabe Stevens, son of the above, who consults his father on everything, first putting the words into his mouth, and then taking them dutifully out again, with a filial reverence hardly credible in these revolutionary days. Even if you approach him on the weather topic, and ask him casually whether it's going to rain, he will defer the subject to his father (should his father be in hail) with an apologetic: "Clouds looks black, bud ah sewdn't like to say. Feythur, divn't ye think we s'll 'ave a sup o' rain before so very long? Glass's fallen a deal sin' noon."

And with the full authority of his father's gloomy "'Appen," perhaps tells you:

"Ay, my feythur thinks we s'll 'ave a sup o' rain before so very long. Glass's fallen a deal sin' noon, 'e says."

And if you ask a small, wiry man, carrying grey sandy whiskers, whose face is seamed and knotted and wrinkled like the bark of a tree, with a few additional noughts and crosses chipped into it, and who bores a hole through you with one terrible keen eye, demanding:

"When's t' buryin', div ye say?"

That's Tankard, and you can't have spoken loud enough. He'll be hurt when he learns that it's the Vicarage you're wanting, and not his bus, and may possibly show it.

But if you put your inquiry to a large, child-eyed, muffin-faced man, who stands gazing at you wistfully from aside as though

"Ay, bud ah'm pressed, Jarge."

Or spin unblushingly on their heel and flee from him, casting over a shoulder:

"Ah mun away back—ah'm forgettin' seummut."

Even Dixon, most genial of men, has been known to wave George Middleway aside, and turn a deaf ear to his persuasions, saying:

"Nay, lad. Ah've gotten train to catch at Whivvle, an' sin' ah can't stop tiv yend, it's no use listenin' to start. Tell it me some uvver time, Jarge!"

For it is a dreadful thing to be hove to by George Middleway, who has been practising nothing but dud-duds all his life, and since George Middleway's legs are no sort of service for pursuit, and all men flee from him, he is a solitary and saddened man. Only his sister can hold converse with him (having been brought up to the language), and it is worth while going into the shop for a pennyworth of something you don't want, when you've made quite sure they're both behind the counter, to witness the amazing facility with which she does it. Three duds tell her everything he has to say—sometimes one; while there are moments even when she can read a message that has got no further than his finger-ends—and claps an answer on to him like the extinguisher of a candle:

"Ay, she telt me 'ersen."

Or, "Dud-dud-dud . . ."

"Then y'ought ti knawn better."

There are others, too, whose identity in giving you direction could be established by a word. If it's a woman who catches your eye over a muslin blind and comes on the strength of it to the doorway to inquire: "Was ye seekin' seumbody?"—that's Mrs. Grazer, beyond a doubt. She let her front parlour in that way to a Hunmouth man for six weeks one summer, and it has unsettled her ever since. And if a boy, with a head that was evidently intended for his bigger brother, and a mouth like the slot of a pillar-box, begins to tell you: "Ay, there's two ways tiv it . . ." hit him at once. That's Steggison.

Meanwhile, despite all these perplexing diversities of direction that would seem to make of the Vicarage an incomprehensible nomad of bricks and mortar—fleeing from you in great fugitive footsteps, and sounding fainter with each successive inquiry—the Vicarage never moves. It stands in the same old spot under the church tower in the back street, within a stride of the lich-gate, and within speaking distance of Fussiter's shop over the way, whose big, bulging windows



[illegible]

[illegible] and that [illegible]. It is averred [illegible] every customer we put getting [illegible] by the way the bell rings; [illegible] and I see little reason to doubt [illegible] Father's trade to a penny. You [illegible] and out of the shop without his [illegible]—I have a particular reason why he shouldn't [illegible] which his jurisdiction extends [illegible] see more [illegible] you have just to sit [illegible] against the stones, and he [illegible] up on the [illegible]. No one has been born to Wring so far in all [illegible] without Father [illegible] quick enough to get down again before [illegible] round the corner, impaling his wretched [illegible] fire in that dread forefinger.

The church will be safe when he catches us—as he [illegible] Jackson, son of the arch heretic John Dingwall Jackson, when Ding had descended rather hurriedly at the [illegible] his footstep, and was standing open-mouthed with his back to the stones and both hands busy in exploration



hymn-books: not to be taken away. If we wish to confess . . . there is a priest ordained to absolve us for chalking iniquities on his front door."

History records that on one occasion an unknown, nameless youth from Whivvle way, kindly corrupted for the performance by Ullbrig friends (who retired), had struggled head and chest above the wall as far as the third button of his waistcoat, counting down, and was busy transferring his rear works to the place secured by his hands (with every reasonable prospect of success) when he found himself skewered suddenly on Father Mostyn's forefinger from the porch, and stiffened rigid in the transfer, half-way.

"Ha!" came the voice of terrible, clear calm, full of suggestive penalties and punishments dire, "what are you doing there?"

"Ah'm gettin' down an' all," said the unknown, with despatch, and the face of him slid from sight like a falling star.

How Ullbrig would fare without such valuable assets as Father Mostyn and the Vicarage in its daily intercourse is a terrible question. Conversation might not become absolutely bankrupt—for we should still have the weather and our neighbour's shortcomings to discuss—but its declaration of dividend would be depressing. In the cool still of evening, when day's burden is off our shoulders, what better joy than to sit on some friendly line of bricks and mortar and discuss Father Mostyn? For there we can take back our full change in small talk for all the curtseys, the cap touchings, the writhings and the reverences paid to the account of his person, and have quite a considerable balance of pride left over for ourselves. We can swing his gate; we can chalk things on his walls; we can fling open his front door; we can trample unhindered into the most sacred and mysterious recesses of his existence; we can pour vials of resentment over his head for his intrusions upon our privacies; we can challenge his free handling of Ullbrig door-knobs, his meddlesome interference with our affairs; we can call him by titles other than "your Reverence," and make an end to this tyranny of priesthood under which we have groaned so long. . . .

Until we meet him next day.

. . . But I wasn't talking about that. I was merely saying how sweet conversation tasted, partaken of on cool bricks and mortar at eventide.

CHAPTER XVII

THE sun had slipped away through Dixon's stackgarth and twilight was subsiding slowly in soft rose amber, like the sands of an hour-glass, as the Spawer wheeled round Hesketh's corner. Against a tremulant pink sky the lich-gate stood out in black profile, edged with luminous copper; the church tower was dipped in dull red gold as far as the luffer of the belfry; and the six Vicarage windows gleamed bloodshot from behind their iron bars when he came upon them for the first time. A group of happy children, playing at calling names and slapping each other down the roadway, stopped their pastime on a sudden and ran up to take awed stock of this presumptuous stranger, who dismounted before his reverence the Vicar's as though he actually meant to open the gate; while a woman under a brown shawl (that history may as well know at once for Mrs. Gatheredge) who had shut herself conclusively out of Fussitter's shop after six attempts, and was nearly forgetting to look round at the Vicarage before going home,



whose bland pressure lurked the hard nip of a gold signet like the hidden fang of dogma for fastening where needful upon the flinching fingers of the faithless—he gave to the Spawer by the gate; threw it, rather, as Noah might have thrown his dove across the face of the waters, with such a beautiful gesture of benediction that in settling down upon the Spawer's fingers it seemed to confer the silent virtue of a blessing.

"The bicycle too," he said, wagging humorous temporal greeting towards it with his left. "Ha! Capital! capital! I thought we shouldn't be walking to-night. There's no evening post, you see, in Ullbrig." He flung the gate backward on its hinges as far as it would go with a miraculous sweep of the arm that made it in a moment six times its size, and converted the overgrown footpath before the Spawer's astonished vision into an ample carriage drive. "Come in; come in. Bring your bicycle along with you. Not that anybody would dare to violate its sanctuary by the Vicarage palings, but the saddle would absorb the dew and be a serious source of perineal danger. Ha! That's better. See; let me help you. We'll manage a place for it somehow. Mind the weeds. They're obstinate nonconformist weeds like the rest of us, and the vicar can do nothing with them. He's cut them and clipped them, and raked them and rooted them and anathematised them, and poured evil-smelling compounds on them that he's had made up at the chemist's in Hunmouth, but it doesn't do them a pennyworth of harm. They prosper. Next he's thinking of cultivating them. Then perhaps their contrary nonconformist spirit will be broken."

All the time, from the gate to the doorway, his hands were hovering busily about the bicycle without once touching it; blessing a handle here, reproving a pedal there, coaxing the wheels, invoking the saddle, exhorting the chain with such a consummate suggestion of assistance that the Spawer felt himself to be doing the lesser share of the work, and indeed, with very little prompting, could have sworn before Justices that his Reverence had carried the machine into the hall unaided.

It was a big, bare hall—square, flagged in stone, and ringing to their footsteps with the sonority of a crypt. From the ceiling depended a swing-lamp of brass at the end of a triple chain. On the left-hand side stood a hard ecclesiastical bench of black oak, primarily provided, no doubt, for the accommodation of those visitors to whom the privilege of a front room audience would be denied. On the right side filed a long line of austere wooden pegs in monastic procession. A

canonical beaver obliterated the first of them; two more held up the dread square mortar-board against the wall between them, diamond-wise, each supporting a corner. For the rest, some sticks and umbrellas—with the ebony divining rod of far-reaching reputation conspicuous among them—completed the movables of the hall. The bicycle followed the mesmeric indication of Father Mostyn's hands into place along the wall under the hat rack, and the priest saw that it was good.

"There we are. Beautiful! beautiful!" he exclaimed, as though breathing pious admiration for this further evidence of the all-beneficent fitness of things. "I knew we could fix you up somehow. Ha! allow me."

By a magnificent act of courtesy he relieved the Spawer of his cap, and swept his own black mortar-board down the rack to make place of honour for it—though there were half-a-dozen unoccupied places to either side. Then, taking up a match-box from the oak bench, which he shook cautiously against his ear for assurance of its store, he invited the Spawer to follow him, and threw open the inner door.

"The vicar, you see," he explained, as his shoulders dipped into the dusk over the threshold, "is his own servant in addition to being everybody else's. He acts as a chastening object-lesson to our Ullbrig pride. We don't go out to service in Ullbrig. We scrub floors, we scour front-door steps, we

bolder type for the Spawer's assistance: ". . . A little crockery to your left here. Ha! . . . mind the table corner. You see the chair?" he led the way into the right-hand room—a room larger than you would have dared to imagine from the roadway—lighted dimly by one tall, smouldering amber window of many panes; heavy with the smell of tobacco, and heaped up in shapeless shadow-masses of disorder. Two great bales of carpet stood together in one corner like the stern roots of trees that had been cut down. On the grained side-cupboard to the left hand of the fireplace were glasses—regiments of glasses—of all sorts and shapes and sizes and qualities. Big, fat, burly country tumblers—typical Yorkshiremen—that you could wash your face in, with great flutings up their sides twice the length and depth of your thumb. There were wine-glasses, port and sherry, and old-fashioned tinted claret, with half-a-dozen rare Venetian champagne, conical and gold-rimmed, that made the Spawer break the Tenth Commandment at each one of them. There were tankards of tarnished silver and pewter; and rising out above the general level in slender gold-tipped spire or swelling minaret of crystal were decanters common and rare. A sombre panel of carved oak, showing hinge marks and a handle, as though it might have been the door of a church pew at one time or other, acted overmantel behind an array of brass and silver candlesticks; while ancient folios, stacked tier upon tier to the ceiling, filled every available inch in the corresponding recess on the window side of the fireplace, and overflowed thence on to the floor, where they lay like so many solidified slabs of lava. A cumbersome early-century round table, rising like a giant toad-stool from a massive octagonal stalk, apparently constituted the larder, to the very verge of whose circumference were cocoa-tins, marmalade jars, tea-cups, tea-pots, saucers; sugar-bags red and blue; some cross-marked eggs in a pie-dish, as though his Reverence had the habit of baptizing each one and making it keep the register of its birth; a cucumber, dipped with the sliced end downward in a jug of water; a brown bread loaf, about three parts through, with the initial crust retained and clapped over it as a lid to keep in the moisture; and some cold ham.

And yet, despite the room's disorder, entering in the wake of those benignant shoulders; treading in the constricted pathways delineated by those sacredotal shoes (virtually and spiritually sandals); wrapped about with the atmosphere of genial indulgence thrown forth this side and that from those priestly fingers, as though they swung an invisible censer—one

lacked all power to question. A swing to the left, the fault of the chair was forgiven; a swing to the right, what fear of treading on crockery; a swing to the front, were he swinging a lanthorn now the way could hardly be better lighted. Such was the power of Father Mostyn.

So, swinging and censing, and asperging and exhorting, and absolving and exorcising till all the ninety-nine devils of disorder were cast out, the priest passed through to the window.

CHAPTER XVIII

"HA!" said he, with the keen voice for a conviction realised, when he came there. "I knew we should catch sight of Mrs. Gatheredge somewhere about. By Fussitter's steps for choice. She suffers dreadfully, poor woman, from a chronic enlargement"—he paused to slip his fingers into the rings of the shutters—"of the curiosity. I believe the disease is incurable. It will kill her in the end, I'm afraid, as it did Lot's wife. Nothing can be done for her, except to protect her as much as possible from harmful excitement. If you don't mind the dark for a moment"—the first shutter creaked upward—"we'll fasten ourselves in before making use of the matches. The strain of looking into his reverence's room when he lights the lamp and has a guest inside might prove too much for her—bring about a fatal congestion of the *glans curiosus*. His reverence, you see, has got to think for others as well as himself. Ha! that's better." The second shutter closed upon the first like the great jaw of a megalosaurus, swallowing up the dwindling remains of daylight at a gulp. "Now we can light up in all good Christian faith and charity."

He struck a match, and so far as the Spawer could observe—since the Vicar's back was turned—appeared to be setting fire to the stack of papers on his writing-table. After a moment, however, when the flame had steadied, he drew it forth transferred to the wick of a composite candle, which he held genially horizontal while he beckoned the Spawer forward by virtue of the signet finger.

"That's it," he said, wagging appreciative grease-drops from the candle. "Come along! come along! Let's see if we can't manage to find some sort of a seat for you. We ought to do—I was sitting down in one myself not so long ago." Still wagging the candle and performing an amiable bear-dance on both feet in a revolving twelve-inch circle as he considered the question on all sides of him, presently he made a pounce into the central obscurity and dragged out a big leather-backed chair by the arm, like a reluctant school-boy. "Ha! here we are," says he, rejoicing

in the capture. "The very thing I had in my mind. Try that. You'll want to beg it of me when you've known its beauties a time or two. That's the chair of chairs, *cathedra cathedrarum*. There's comfort for you!"

Negligently wiping the leather-work with a corner of his cassock, he declared the chair open for the Spawer's accommodation.

"Our Ullbrig dust," he observed, as the Spawer sat down in some of it, "is like our Ullbrig dissent—there's no withstanding it. You may expel it as often as you like, but it'll get the better of you somehow. Curtains only encourage it. If you want to catch all the dust in Ullbrig—with a little from Whivvle and Garthston—hang up curtains. That's the way. Hang up curtains, and you'll soon catch all the dust there is to be caught, to say nothing of microbes and pulmonary danger in breathing air charged with suspended impurities. Ullbrig, of course, knows nothing about microbes; consequently is not afraid. Ullbrig is afraid of nothing it can't see—except at night, and then it wouldn't go to bed without a candle for worlds. Candles by night and curtains by day; that's our formula. Look about you when you're going back, and you'll see the candles, and next time you come as far as Hesketh's corner by daylight, just slip down the High Street and take a look at the curtains. You'll see 'em; as stiff as our Ullbrig pride, with the biggest pattern we can get for the

eighteenth-century jar, lavishly pictured and proverbed; and with a coloured, clay churchwarden as long as a fiddlestick, that looked as if it would snap brittly in two of its own weight at the first attempt to lift it. Lastly, all these things being accumulated one by one, and laid out temptingly on the little round table, with the blue flame established at the bottom of the kettle, and tapering downwards to its junction with the wick like a sea-anemone, Father Mostyn permitted himself to sink back hugely upon the chair, lifting both feet from the ground as he did so, in supreme testimony to the full ripe fruits of ease.

"Well," said he, setting his fingers to work in the depths of the tobacco jar, "and what about the music?" His tongue appeared reflectively in his cheek for a moment, and his keen eye fixed the far wall on a nice point of remembrance. "Let's see. . . . A symphonium?"

The Spawer adjusted the balance gently: "A concerto."

"Ha! a concerto." Enlightenment swept over the Vicar's face like a tide of sunlight, and his shoulders shook as with the laughter of gladsome things. "Beautiful! beautiful! To think of our stubborn Ullbrig soil's being made to yield a concerto. Had it been a turnip now. But a concerto! Ullbrig knows nothing of concertos. It would know still less if you were to explain. Explanations only confuse us—besides being an unwarrantable violation of our precious rights of ignorance. Tell friend Jevons you're at work upon a concerto, and see what he says. He'll tell you, yes, his son's got one." Father Mostyn cast the forefinger of conviction at him. "Depend upon it, that's what he'll tell you. His son's got one. A beauty with bells that he gave eighteenpence for. Meaning one of those nickel-silver mouth-organs such as we can't go to Hunmouth Fair without bringing back with us—unless we plunge for a concertina. It's got to be one or the other, or people mightn't think we'd been to Hunmouth Fair at all, and that's a light too glorious to be hid under a bushel. But it's all one in name to us whatever we get. We call it a 'music.' Whether it's a piano, or a fiddle, or a song, or a symphonium, or a sonata, or a Jew's harp, or a concertina, or a sackbut—the definition doesn't alter. We call it a 'music.' 'So-and-So's gotten a grand music.' 'It's a grand music, yon.' That's our way."

The little black cat of a kettle, after purring complacently for a while over the blue flame as though it nursed a kitten at suck, seemed to discern some hostile intruder by the far

cupboard, for suddenly it arched its lidded back and spat out across the table.

"Ha!" Father Mostyn turned gladsomely at the sound. "There's music for you. Come; you're a whisky man? Say when and fear not."

"If you don't mind, I'll say it now," said the Spawer, with laughing apology.

"No?" His Reverence held out the uncorked bottle by the neck, persuasively tilted, his eyebrows elevated like trellised arches in their surprise. "Think twice, my son, before committing yourself to hasty judgments. You'll taste no better whisky unless you get it as I get this, through the kind favour of Father Bernard Carrick, of the Blessed Society of Jesus." Then seeing the Spawer was not to be moved: "*Principiis obstatis?* Ha! a glass of sherry, then? Port? Claret? Burgundy? Moselle? Benedictine? Chartreuse? Anisette? Curaçoa? . . . Ha! capital!" For the Spawer had hailed the vicarial omnibus at Benedictine, though, being under full way, it could not be brought up short of Curaçoa. "You won't beat Benedictine for a standard liqueur. Apart from its pleasant effect upon the palate, it has a valuable corroborant action on the gastric juices, and tends to the promotion of chyme."

All in speaking he produced the familiar flagon from the



he sipped warily from an edge of the smoking glass to verify his expectations of the flavour, nipped his lips for a moment in judicial degree, and subsided slowly upon the chair in a long breath of rapture, like a balloon with the gas issuing from its valve, extending the tumbler towards the Spawer for wassail —"here's success to our concerto, and may your days be long in the land with us. We're a stiff-necked and obstinate generation, who worship gods of our own making, and have more than a shrewd idea that the devil's in music (we know for certain he's in the Church); but we bake good pies for all that, and our nonconformist poultry can't be beaten."

The Spawer laughed. "And our postman?" he asked.

CHAPTER XIX

"HA!" Father Mostyn played upon the note momentously, as though he were throwing open the grand double gates of discussion. "Pamela, you mean! I knew we should come to that before long. No help for it." He subpœnaed the Spawer for witness to the wisdom of his conclusions with a wagged forefinger. "But Pamela's not Ullbrig"—the mere idea of such a thing seemed to set his teeth on edge like the sound of a shrieking slate pencil, and his shoulders sought each other instinctively in the first contraction of a shudder. "Pamela wasn't fashioned out of our Ullbrig clay. She's not like the rest of us; comes of a different class altogether. You can't mistake it. Take note of her when she laughs—you're a musical man and you'll soon see—she covers the whole diapason. Ullbrig doesn't laugh like that. Ullbrig laughs on one note as though it were a plough furrow. There's nothing of cadence about our Ullbrig laughter—that's a thing

less to do. 'Peace be with you'—that's a favourite idol of ours. 'In my Father's house are many mansions'—that's another. Friend Tankard worships nothing else. Something bright and simple and cheering, you see, that can be pinned on the wall in colours, and made to hide where the damp's striking through. Ullbrig doesn't understand Pam any more than it understands the transit of Venus or the rings of Saturn. Pam's above our heads and comprehension. Because she goes to church on Sunday, and doesn't walk with our Ullbrig young men down Lovers' Lane at nightfall, we say she's proud. Because she's too generous to refuse them a word in broad daylight, when they ask for it, we say she's forward. Because she never says unkind things of us all in turn behind our backs, and won't listen to any, we say she's disagreeable. Because she doesn't read the post-cards on her way round, and tell us whether Miss So-and-So ever hears from that Hunmouth young gentleman or not, we say she keeps a still tongue in her head—which is our Ullbrig idiom for a guilty conscience. Ha! that we had only a few more Pams—with due gratitude to Blessed Mary for the one we've got."

"As a postman," said the Spawer, entering into the Vicar's appreciation, "she's the most astonishing value I ever saw. The girl seems to have a soul. Who is she? and where does she come from?"

"Ha!" Father Mostyn's brows converged upon the pipe-bowl in the hollow of his knee, and his cassock swelled to a long breath of mystery. "Who is she? and where does she come from? . . . Those are the questions. *A priori*, I'm afraid there's nothing to answer them. So far, it seems to have been Heaven's wise purpose to reveal her as a beautiful mystery; an incarnate testimony to the teaching of Holy Church—if only Ullbrig knew the meaning of the word testimony. She came to Ullbrig, in the first place, with her mother, as quite a little girl, and lodged with friend Morland at the Post Office. I believe there was some intention on her mother's part of founding a small preparatory school in combination with poultry farming at the time. Yes, poor woman, I rather fear that was her intention. She seemed to think it would yield them both a livelihood, and give Pamela the benefit of new-laid eggs; but she died suddenly, the very day after Tankard had agreed to let her the cottage down Whivvle Lane at four and sixpence a week—being three shillings the rent of the cottage, and eighteenpence because

she was a lady. Ha! that's the way with us. To try and do you one; do your father one; do your mother one; do your sister one; do your brother one; but particularly do one to them that speak softly with you, and his reverence the vicar. Him do half a dozen if you can, being an ecclesiast, and so difficult to do. Save up your light sovereigns and your doubtful half-crowns against tithe-day, and call upon him when the light's failing. Peradventure he may do you the injustice of trusting you, and take 'em. Then with what joy can we sing the doxology and praise God from whom all blessings flow. Ha! But his reverence the vicar's got a beautiful method of dealing with tithe-money now. He doesn't take it into the hand in bulk any longer and say 'Thank you.' He weighs it. That's what he does. Weighs it all through to the last half sovereign in front of you before writing the receipt, and tests the silver, if need be, with a pair of pliers." His lips pursed up for the amber mouthpiece, and melted over it in gorgeous sunlight of exultant wisdom. "Yes." He wiped the smile off his mouth with one ruminative stroke of his sleek fingers—you might almost suppose he had palmed it, and slipped it up his sleeve, so quickly did it come away. "She died suddenly, poor woman, before I could get to her. Cardiac hæmorrhage, commonly, and not always incorrectly, called a broken heart. No doubt about it. They sent for me three times, but it happened most grievously that I had



"And you weren't able to trace the mother's movements before she came to Ullbrig?"

"No further than Hunmouth." His Reverence tried the edge of the Spawer's interest with a keen eye through drawn lashes, as though it were a razor he was stropping. "Following up a theory of mine, we traced her as far as Hunmouth. But for that, if we'd taken friend Morland's advice, we should have lost her altogether. As I predicted, we found she'd been living for some time in small lodgings there. . . . There was some question of music teaching, I believe."

"Music teaching?" The Spawer leaned on the interrogative with all the weight of commiserative despair.

"I rather gathered so. She gave lessons to the landlady's daughter, I fancy, in return for the use of the piano, and she had a blind boy studying with her for a while. His family thought of making him a church organist, but unfortunately for all parties concerned, the boy's father failed. Yes, failed rather suddenly, poor man, and cast quite a gloom over the musical outlook. Then Pamela seems to have acquired diphtheria from a sewer opening directly under the bedroom window, and had a narrow squeak for it; and after that her terrified mother fled the town with her, and brought her into the country. There's no danger of sewers in the country, you see. We haven't such things; we know better. We simply cast our slops across the back-yard—give 'em a good circular sweep as they go out, and leave the rest to an evaporative providence. That's the way to obviate diphtheria."

"And there's what brought them to Ullbrig?" asked the Spawer.

"There's what brought them to Ullbrig. What brought them to Hunmouth is still a matter for conjecture. I called upon the doctor subsequently who attended Pam there, but he could give me no information about them, beyond the fact that his bill had been paid before they left."

"I should have thought, though," said the Spawer, tipping his lips with golden Benedictine, and sending the bouquet reflectively through his nostrils, "that she would have left letters—or something of the sort—behind her, which might have been followed up."

"Ha!" Father Mostyn blew down this speculative wall-building with a long Joshua-like trumpet of smoke. "One would have thought so, naturally. But no; not a single piece of manuscript among all her possessions."

The Spawer girded up his loins, and wrestled with the evidence in the full spirit of investigation.

"That," said he, "looks awfully much as though they'd been purposely destroyed."

Father Mostyn's lips tightened significantly, and he nodded his head with sagacious indulgence for the tolerable work of a novice.

"Moreover," he took up, making no verbal comment on the hypothesis, but passing straightway to the next link in the chain of circumstance, "in such books as belonged to her the fly-leaf was invariably missing. Torn bodily out. Not a doubt about it."

"To remove traces of her identity?"

The Vicar slipped his forefinger into the pipe-bowl and gave the tobacco a quick, conclusive squeeze. "Unquestionably."

"But for what reason, do you think?"

"Ha!" Not lack of reason, but abundance of it, drew forth the interjection—a fine, fat, juicy specimen of its kind, like a green cornstalk, full of the succulent joys of things mysterious, whereat his Reverence sat back luxuriously in the arm-chair, with fingers outspread tip to tip over the convex outline of his cassock, and legs crossed reposefully for the better enjoyment of his own discourse. "In the first place," said he, focussing the situation through contracted lashes, "she was a lady. Not a doubt about it. No mere professional man's daughter

possibly distinguished himself in the Indian service (most likely a major-general and K.C.B.), living on a beautiful estate somewhere down south—say Surrey or the Hampshire Downs."

"Couldn't you have advertised in some of the southern papers?" suggested the Spawer.

"Precisely. We advertised for some time, and to some considerable extent, in such of them as would be likely to come under the General's notice—but without success. Indeed, none was to be expected. Men of the General's station in life don't trouble to read advertisements, much less answer them —and if, in this case, he'd read it, it wouldn't have changed his attitude towards a discarded daughter or induced a reply. Therefore, to continue advertising would have been merely to throw good money after bad. . . . Ha! Consequently the next step in our investigations is to decide what could be responsible for her detachment from these attractive surroundings, and her subsequent lapse into penurious neglect. It couldn't have been the failure of her father's fortune. A catastrophe of this sort wouldn't have cut her off completely from the family and a few, at least, of her necessarily large circle of friends. Some of her clerical half-cousins, too, would have come forward to her assistance, depend upon it. But even supposing the probabilities to be otherwise, then there would be still less reason for her voluntary self-excision. Though under these circumstances, one might understand her never referring to her family connection, it's inconceivable to suppose that she should have gone to any particular trouble to conceal traces of the fact. To have done so would have been a work of supererogation, besides running counter to all our priestly experience of the human heart and its workings. No. In the resolute attempt to cut herself off from her family the priestly eye perceives the acting hand of pride. Not a doubt about it. Pride did her. The pride of love. No mistaking it. The headstrong pride of love. Faith removes mountains, but love climbs over 'em, at all costs. Depend upon it, she'd given her heart to some man against the General's will, and run away and married him. Marriage was the first step in her descent."

"Or do you think . . ." hazarded the Spawer, with all humility for intruding his little key into so magnificent a lock of hypothesis, "that marriage was a missing step altogether, and she tripped for want of it?"

"Ha!" Father Mostyn received the suggestion with

magnanimous courtesy—almost as though it had been a duly expected guest. "I think not. Under certain conditions of life that would be an admirable hypothesis for working purposes. But it won't fit the present case. In the first instance, we must remember that those little idiosyncrasies of morality occur less frequently in the class of society with which we're dealing, and that when they actually occur, the most elaborate precautions are taken against any leakage of the fact. Moreover, let's look at the actual evidence. All the woman's linen—the handkerchiefs, the underclothing, the petticoats, the chemises, and so forth—were embroidered with the monogram 'M. P. S.' standing, not a doubt about it, for Mary Pamela Searle. Some of the child's things, bearing the identical monogram, showed that they'd been cut down for her, while one or two more recent articles—of a much cheaper material—were initialled simply 'P. S.' in black marking ink. It's necessary to remember this. Now, if we turn from the linen to the books I spoke about and contrast their different methods of treatment, we shall find strong testimony to the support of my contention. On the one hand, linen, underclothing, chemises, petticoats, pocket-handkerchiefs, and so forth, marked plainly 'M. P. S.' and 'P. S.' On the other hand, a Bible, a book of Common Prayer in padded morocco, evidently the property of a lady;

hardly be in the nature of a gift-book. People of social distinction, brought up in conformity with the best teachings of Holy Church, and abhorring all forms of unorthodoxy as they would uncleanliness, don't make presents to themselves of Bibles. That's a plebeian practice, savouring objectionably of free-thinking and dissent. The Bible is not mentioned or made use of by well-bred people in that odious popular manner. No, the book would figure in her school-room equipment as part of a necessary instruction, but no more.

". . . Ha!" His hand, on its way to the round table, arrested itself suddenly in mid-air as though to impose a listening silence. " . . . There goes friend Davidson—keeping his promise. I thought it was about his time. He gave me his sacred word he wouldn't touch a drop of liquor in Ullbrig for three months, so now he has to trot off to Shippus instead." The Spawer listened, but could get not the faintest hint of the delinquent's passage. "So now," Father Mostyn took up, starting his hand on again with a descriptive relaxation of its muscles, as though the culprit had just rounded the corner, and there were nothing further of him worth listening for, " . . . we've got the whole case in the hollow of our hands. We see that the breach with the family was brought about by her own act, and that that act was marriage. But it wasn't merely marriage against the general's consent or sanction. Marriages of disobedience and self-will are nearly always, in our priestly experience, forgiven at the birth of the first child; more especially, of course, if it happens to be a son. . . . Therefore we must find a stronger divisional factor than a marriage of disobedience. Ha! undoubtedly. A marriage of derogation. No mistaking it. A marriage of derogation. She married beneath her. That's an unpardonable offence in families of birth and position. We can forgive a daughter for marrying above her, but we can't forgive a daughter for marrying beneath her—even when she's the only daughter we've got. Moreover, this case was badly aggravated by the fact that there was no money in it. She fell in love with some penniless scamp of a fellow, with an irresistible black moustache and dark eyes—there are plenty of 'em knocking about in London society, who couldn't produce a receipted bill or a banker's reference to save their lives—got her trousseau together by stealth; had it all proudly embroidered with the name she was about to take; kissed her father more affectionately than usual one night . . . and the next morning was up with the lark and miles away." He

kept casting the ingredients one after another into the mysterious luncheon with a throw of alternate hands—the right hand for the sin she had committed: the left hand for the penniless wastrel of a fellow: the right hand again for her trousseau: the left hand for the elopement: and so on, with all the unction of a chef engaged upon the preparation of some great dish, and stuck the spoon into it with a fine, conclusive air.

"After that," said he, interrupting the sentence for a moment to give two or three reclamatory puffs at his pipe, "the rest is as plain as print. She'd made a bad bargain with her family, and she'd made a worse with her husband. Depend upon it. Searle was a gambler—an improvident, prodigal, reckless rascal—who tapped what money she had like a cask of wine. As soon as Pamela was born, the wretched woman began to see where things were drifting. She daredn't suggest retrenchment to her husband, but she began to practise a few feeble economies in the house and upon her own person. No more silks and satins after that. No more embroidered chemises. No more fine linen. Nothing new for Pamela, where anything could be cut down. Nothing new for herself, where anything old would do. Cheapen the living here, cheapen the living there—until at last, thank God! in the fourth year of his reign, this *monstrum nulla virtute redemptum a vitiis* takes to his wife's bed—not having one of his own—and

of anybody—not even his own—if he can help it. Not to Cobbler Dingwall. Cobbler Dingwall doesn't shelter a daughter of Mary. Heaven sends down no blessing on Cobbler Dingwall's work. We find it's clumsy and doesn't last. No, we don't take 'em to any of these. We take 'em to shoemaker Morland. That's where we take 'em. Shoemaker Morland. He's the man. All the rest are only cobblers, being under no patronage of Blessed Mary, but friend Morland's a shoemaker. Moreover, the Post Office hasn't lacked for lodgers since Pam came to it—there's the schoolmaster there now. A strange, un-get-at-able sort of a fellow, to be sure, whom I strongly suspect of nursing secret aggression against the Church, but still . . . a payer of bills, and in that respect a welcome addition to the Morland household."

"Friend Morland, then," said the Spawer, "combines the offices of shoemaker and postmaster-general for Ullbrig?"

Father Mostyn forefingered the statement correctively.

"Those are his offices. But he doesn't combine them. He keeps them scrupulously distinct. One half of him is postmaster-general and the other is shoemaker. I forget just at the moment which half of him you've got to go to if you want stamps, but you might just as well try to get cream from a milk biscuit as buy stamps at the shoemaking side. Apart from these little peculiarities, however, he's as inoffensive a specimen of dissent as any Christian might hope to find. Without a trained theological eye one might take him any day for a hard-working, respectable member of the True Body. His humility in spiritual matters is almost Catholic. You'd be astonished to find such humility in the possession of a Noncomformist—until you knew what exalted influence had brought it about. He repudiates the Nonconformist doctrine that the Divine copyright of teaching souls goes along with the possession of a fourpenny Bible. His view on the question is that the Book 'takes overmuch understanding to try and explain it to anybody else.' On this point, with respect to Pamela, I've never had any trouble with him. She's been born and brought up in the Church; she'd true Church blood in her veins. Her mother was a Churchwoman. Her grandfather, like the gallant old soldier that he was, was a Churchman; a strong officer of the Church Militant, occupying the family pew every Sunday morning, who would have died of apoplectic mortification at the thought that any descendant of his should ever sink so low as to sit on the varnished schismatical benches of an Ullbrig meeting-house. All which,

when I put it before him. Friend Morland saw in a clear and catholic spirit. It was for a short time he wanted to make a compromise—at the instigation of his wife undoubtedly—whereby Pamela was to attend church in the mornings and meeting-house in the evenings—a most odious and unscriptural arrangement, quite incompatible with canonical teaching. However, special light of grace was poured into his heart from above, and he perceived the aged General in such a wild revelation storming with martial anger at this act of infidelity in one of his flesh and blood, that he woke up in a great sweat two nights successively, and came running before breakfast to tell me that the spiritual responsibility of a general's granddaughter was proving too much for him, and he'd be humbly grateful if his reverence the vicar would take the matter on his own shoulders, and bear witness (should any be required) that he (John William Morland) had in all things done his utmost to act in conformity with what he thought to be the General's wishes. So I made him stand up in the hall and recite a proper *declaratio abjurationis* before me then and there, gave him his coveted *ego te absolvo Joannes*, and received Pamela forthwith as spiritual ward in our most Catholic Church."

"But is she going to consecrate all her days to the carrying of letters?" asked the Spawer, in a voice of some concern.

doing Pamela a grievous and irreparable wrong. Two things we had to bear constantly in mind and reconcile, so far as we were able, from day to day." He ticked them off on his fingers like the heads of a discourse: "1. That she was a lady; the daughter of a lady; the granddaughter of a lady. 2. That she was become by adoption a daughter of the soil, dependent on her own exertions for her subsistence and happiness. At one time, so difficult did the two things seem to keep in adjustment, I had serious thoughts of taking her bodily under my own charge and packing her off to school. But after a while, I came to reflect that it would be an act of great unwisdom—apart from the fear that it might be making most impious interference with the designs of Providence. Providence plainly had brought her, and to send her off again for the purpose of having her trained exclusively in the accomplishments of a lady would simply have been contempt of the Divine laws and a deferment of the original difficulty to some more pressing and inopportune moment. My work, you see, was here in Ullbrig. His reverence is tied to the soil like the rest of us—ploughing, sowing, harrowing, scruffling, hoeing, and reaping all his days—though, for the matter of that, there's precious little ear he gets in return for his spiritual threshing. Moreover, there's always the glorious uncertainty of sudden death in the harvest-field; and then what would be likely to happen to a girl thrown on her own resources at the demise of her only friend and protector? Would she be better circumstanced to face the world bravely as a child with his reverence helping her unostentatiously by her elbow and accustoming her to it, or as a young lady in fresh bewilderment from boarding-school, with his reverence fast asleep in the green place he's chosen for himself under the east window? Ha! no mistake about it. His reverence has seen too many nursery governesses and mothers' helps and ladies' companions recruited straight from the schoolroom, with red eyes and black serge, to risk Pamela's being among the number. Out in the world there's no knowing what might happen or have happened to her. Here in Ullbrig, you see, she stands on a pedestal to herself, above all our local temptations. Temptations, in the mundane sense of the word, don't exist for her. One might as well suppose the possibility of your being tempted from the true canons of musical art by hearing Friend Barclay sing through the tap-room window of the Blue Bell, or of his reverence the vicar's being proselytised to Methodism by hearing Deacon Dingwall

Jackson pray the long prayer with his eyes shut. No; our local sins fall away from Pamela as naturally and unregarded as water off a duck's back. Such sins as she has are entirely spiritual—little sins of indiscrimination, we may term them. The sin of generosity—giving too much of her favour to the schismatical; the sin of toleration—inclining too leniently towards the tenets of dissent; the sin of forbearance—making too much allowance for the sins and wickednesses of others; the sin of equanimity—being too little angered by the assaults and designs of the unfaithful against Holy Church. —all beautiful qualities of themselves when confined to the temporal side of conduct, but sinful when thoughtlessly prolongated into the domain of spirituals, where conduct should subordinate itself to the exact scale of scientific theology. Spiritual conduct without strict theological control is music without bars; poetry without metre; a ship without a rudder; free-will; nonconformity; dissent; infidelity; agnosticism; atheistic darkness. Ha! but our concern for her future isn't on these counts. The question that's bothering us now, as you rightly put it, is: Is she going to consecrate all her days to the carrying of letters?"

"As a career," commented the Spawer, "I'm afraid there's not much to recommend it. The office of post-girl seems, from what I know about the subject, peculiar to Ullbrig. There's precious little chance of promotion, I should think.

as snow for Friend Morland's delicate stomach; and brown bread as brown as shoe-leather and mellow as honey for his reverence the vicar. Three loaves a week without fail, because there's nobody else in Ullbrig can make 'em to his satisfaction—and she wanted to have the paying for 'em herself into the bargain. And she can paper-hang and paint. She and his reverence are going to undertake a few matters of church decoration shortly. And she can milliner and dressmake. If it wasn't for Pamela, Emma Morland would soon lose her reputation as our leading society *modiste*. Not even the brass plate would save her—if she polished it three times a day. Ullbrig doesn't want brass plates; Ullbrig wants style. So when Ullbrig goes to Emma Morland for a new dress and Pamela's not there, Ullbrig says, 'Oh, it doesn't matter just then, it'll call again.' Ha! says it'll call again. But what I wanted to illustrate . . . with regard to telegraphic departments, of course . . . you see . . . her remarkable versatility. Not only that . . . " the old fog showed signs of settling over him once more, but he shook it off with a decisive spurt. "She's inherited music from her mother in a marked degree. It seems to come naturally to her. I think you'd be surprised. What little bit I've been able to do for her I've done—taught her the proper value of notation, the correct observance of harmonies, clefs, solfeggio, scales, legato, contra punctum, and so forth. The amazing thing is the way she's picked it up. Not a bit of trouble to her, apparently. What I should have done without her at the organ—she's our ecclesiastical organist, you know—I daren't think. And it occurred to me . . . I felt it would be such a pity to let the chance go by . . . if we could only induce you. . . . You see, she's not exactly an ordinary girl. Different from the rest of us altogether. . . . And I thought if we could only induce you to give her the benefit of a little musical advice . . ." He paused inferentially.

"With a view," asked the Spawer, "to what is diabolically called the profession?"

Father Mostyn caught the note of dissuasive alarm.

"Ha! not exactly the profession . . ." he said. "I wasn't so much meaning that. But I thought, you see, she'd appreciate it so much . . . and there'd be no fear of her abusing your favour in the slightest degree. Unfortunately . . . I'm afraid you'd find our piano rather below par . . . the Ullbrig air has a peculiar corrodent action upon the strings, quite hostile to all harmonic accord. Tuning's no

good; indeed, it only seems to unsettle 'em. But if . . . sometime when you're here you wouldn't mind my asking her in . . . just for a short while?"

"Not the least bit in the world," said the Spawer. "And for as long as you like."

"Ha!" The fog lifted off Father Mostyn's utterance in sudden illumination of sunlight, and he rubbed his knees jocosely. "I thought we should manage it. Capital! capital! We must fix up a sort of a soirée some night. That's what we must do. Fix up a sort of soirée some night and feed you. We won't speak of dining; that's a word we leave behind us when we come to Ullbrig. But we'll feed you, and give Pamela a chance to display her culinary skill. Of course, we know all about our little business of last night, so we needn't speak darkly. . . ."

"The deuce we do!" exclaimed the Spawer, laughing. "And I've been thinking all the time we didn't."

Father Mostyn spread his fingers with priestly unction.

"That," said he, "is one of our fatal Ullbrig errors; always to think that his reverence doesn't know things. No matter how many times we prove to our cost that he does, we go on acting upon the supposition that he doesn't. It's a source of endless trouble to us. Of course, in the present instance, we absolve you. Your tongue was honourably tied. Pamela told

"Capital! capital! Must fix up a sort of a soirée some night. That's what we must do. Fix up a sort of a soirée some night. . . . Good-night . . . some night. . . . Good-night . . . and feed you. Won't speak of dining . . . leave behind us when we come to Ullbrig. Feed you . . . feed you . . . feed you."

And as far away as the very last gate of all, when the Spawer turned his head back towards the scene of his evening, he seemed to hear the bells wafting to him over the corn, as though languid with pursuit:

". . . Feed you. Feed you. Feed . . . you."

CHAPTER XX

AH! the dear little Ullbrig Post Office during these never-to-be-forgotten Pamela days, that no man among us knew how to get by without twisting his head. Three cottages went to the making of it, in the wide middle of the main street on the right hand as you go to Cliff Wrangham. Who does not remember the big, smooth, noble round cobbles, planted row upon row in front of it, and the dear little double-door that trapped your fingers delightfully with its top half, while you pulled it to with the lower, and the penny bottle of ink, and the sheets of writing-paper in the window that no one ever seemed to buy. How many of us have looked at them in our time, and how often! with our boot-heels off the ground as far as we could get them, and our tongues stuck against the panes as though we were leeches, crawling up the window inch by inch for a sight over the inner ribbed-glass screen. Which of us in those days has never envied Jan Venery his lame leg for the sake of that glorious six-inch sole,

ower yer boot-toes ootside? Gan yer ways to Fussitter's, where 'appen ye'll spend seummut. That's place for such-like as you."

From which it must not be inferred that the postmaster suffered from any habitual shortness of temper. As a shoemaker he was the kindliest, simple-faced man you might imagine, with a grey goat's beard and an honest smile on his rough face; who took your boots from you with a loving hand, stroking them all over as though they were kittens, and would do anything rather than promise you them back again.

"Nay . . . ah dossen't (daren't) say Monday. Ye mun't ask me to say Monday. Monday's ower nigh. Tuesday's scarcelins no better. There's nobbut a day betwixt 'em, an' ah've that much to do wi' Gooviment business an' all, ye understan'. Wednesday? . . . Nay, it's 'ard to say while ah've looked 'em ower a bit, an' ah sewdn't like to disappoint ye. Ye'd best leave 'em an' let me do what ah can."

But as the postmaster, John William Morland was a terrible instrument of the Government, who wore his office like an inscrutable iron mask, and extinguished the shoemaker and his smile as completely as if he had stuffed them both under the counter. It was commonly reported in the village that even when his own wife wanted a stamp she had to squeeze round the counter with a penny in her hand and ask for it like the rest of us—John William having received no instructions to act with her in any other way. I can't say for certain how this might be, never having seen it done, but I do know from personal experience that one's knees misgave one at times in the presence of that grim figure, and one suddenly perceived the full responsibility of buying stamps in its true and formidable light. To run into the Post Office hot and steaming and rap with the edge of your penny on the tightened oilcloth of the counter was an easy thing to do, but when the figure of the postmaster rose up in front of you like the genius of the ring—silent, impassive, and appalling—with his great, gaunt, dobbin-blackened knuckles touching the edge of the counter, and his inflexible, cast-iron face towering above you—you began to wish you'd come slower (or not at all), and taken more time to think clearly what you'd come for.

"Noo then," he would say admonitorily, if we showed an inclination to look at him too long without speaking, "ye've gotten a tongue. Let's know what ye're after. Ah'm not employed to stand at counter an' be stared at. Ah've gotten seummut better to do nor that."

And it wasn't a bit of use, either, showing him your penny, for Government had given him no instructions to regard the exhibition of a penny as in any way constituting a legal request for stamps.

"Nay, that's no use," he would tell you promptly and with decision. "Ah've no instructions to deal wi' onnybody's pennies wi'out bein' properly informed what they're for. It says nowt about it 'i schedule. 'Appen they mud be for a bottle o' writin'-ink or a packet o' paper or some shoe-laces or seummut else o' sort, an' then where sewd we be if ah'd tekken on mysen to gie ye a stamp? A man's gotten all them things to think about, an' more, when 'e keeps Post Office."

Once Jevons' new lad clattered over the cobbles into the office when I was coming out, and I stayed by the door to count my change.

"Stamp!" says he, in a voice as if he'd cried "Milk!" to an area, and planking his penny down on the counter with a crack that left the Queen's head imprinted in the oilcloth and brought the postmaster up in front of him like a harlequin shot out of a trap-door.

"Noo then," says the postmaster austerely, tiptoeing over the counter towards him on his finger-ends and disregarding the first application, since it had come to him unofficially at the shoemaker's bench and was, moreover, too loud to have

maker by going into the office holding a pair of boots in one hand and a penny in the other, the thing was not to be done.

"Stop a bit," the stern voice of the postmaster would tell you when you laid the penny and the boots on to the counter together, and shot out your dual request for a "stamp an' these 'ere solin'." "Let's 'ave one thing at a time. Stamps 'as nowt to do wi' shoes, an' shoes 'as nowt to do wi' stamps. Tek yer boots off'n counter, or 'appen ah s'll be slippin' 'em away by parcel post, an' then where sewd we be? . . . Noo; stamps fost (first). Let's know what ye want."

Which point being settled, and the penny rung into the till, he would suddenly cast his governmental mask under the counter, throw the austerity out of his voice, and catch up the shoemaker's smile all at once in a quick change act marvellous to behold.

"Noo; let's 'ave a look at boots an' see what can be done wi' 'em," he would say, holding out his great, rough, kindly hands, palms uppermost, as though to receive a baby from you. "Ay, they'll do wi a bit o' solin' an' all, noo. It's a goodish while sin' they was done. Mah wod! but ye've trodden 'em strangelins down o' this side. Ye mun carry a 'eavy conscience i' yer left leg."

And would be as bright and happy and cheerful over them as a sparrow after rain, until you were ungenerously tempted to take advantage of his rare good nature and hazard inquiries about their completion—when anxiety withered his smile, and he would use what bit was left of it to look at you sadly.

"Nay, man," he would charge you then, with injured reproof. "Ah've scarcelins gotten boots into my 'ands, an' noo ye're talkin' o' wantin' 'em back again. Let's 'ave a little consider-A-shun. Ye divn't suppose a body can mend a pair o' boots by lookin' at 'em, surely."

And because there was only one Pam in Ullbrig, and she was here—and might be listening to every word we said for all we knew and hoped—we bore kindly with him, speaking as softly as we could (for the voice to be in any way effective round corners), and even cheerfully proposed calling in again later, when he should have had time to look the boots over a bit. For what did it profit a man if he got his boots done at Dingwall's in an hour and lost Pam altogether?

But the most important moment of the official day was that when the post-bag came in—for then we knew we should see Pam before very long, and the humblest of us might venture to ask her if she had a letter for him (without the slightest

obligation to expect one) if only his tongue would move when the time came. Every morning the familiar rickety red mail-cart came lunging round the bottom corner on its weak springs, casting James Maskill so recklessly from side to side that at times he looked as though there were half a dozen of him struggling for possession of the seat, and rattled him finally up to the Post Office over the great round cobbles with only his nose holding his cap on, at a few odd minutes to either side of half-past nine. Government itself said nine, but James Maskill said it couldn't be done under half-past, and proved it. He was a large, freckle-faced, loose-jointed fellow, with great fingers like the claws of a lobster, and legs that Government never got within six inches of when it made him his trousers. It was not well to call "Carrots" after him, even in fun, for he had a morose and terrible memory like the worm that dieth not, and humour was ever distasteful to his nature. One day Stergison happened to say "Carrots" softly to himself, never thinking a bit—as anybody might do—and three weeks later, when he'd forgotten all about it, his left ear suddenly banged off like a cannon as he was looking into Fussitter's window, and he heard James Maskill's voice out of the depths of the explosion telling him to "say it again." Of words James had few, but such as he let fall were like hot coppers thrown out to the organ-grinder's monkey, to be picked up with caution. Until Government made its last great redistribution of the

Shep Stevens threw in his lot with the new movement and cried aloud for reform, through the mouthpiece of his son Jabe, who approached him filially on the subject to learn his views.

"Feythur," he said to him one night after tea, "divn't ye think seummut ought to be done about letters? Divn't ye think Jan Willim an' James's gettin' ower much power betwixt 'em, an' usin' it wrongfully to our discomfiture? Divn't ye think we ought to rise up an' gird ussens an' put an end tiv it before it's waxed ti (too) strong for us? There's some on 'em talkin' o' passin' a public vawt (vote) o' censure, an' askin' 'em both to mend their ways at peril o' bein' praw-tested to Gooviment. Are ye in onny road i' favour o' convenin' such a meetin'?"

"Ay," said Shep sententiously, with a sudden juiciness of mouth requiring the application of a back-hander. "Ah am. An' Blue Bell'd be as likely a place for it as onny. Ah'll be gannin' round noo to mek a few inquiries." Whereupon Jabe Stevens spake to Ullbrig as follows:

"My feythur's of opinion seummut ought to be done soon about letters. 'E says Jan Willim an' James 'as got the pride o' Satan into their 'earts, an's usin' their power sinfully to oor destruction. 'E says they are makin' friends o' the mammon of oonrighteousness, an' oppressin' the poor an' needy. 'E says they are become same as them 'at psalmist tells us on: '. . . They are corrupt an' speak wickedly consarnin' oppression; they speak loftily. . . . They 'ev sharpened their tongues like a sarpint; adders' poison is under their lips. All the day long 'ev we been plagued, an' chastened ivvery mornin'. Noo let oor adversaries be clothed wi' shame . . . ' says my feythur, 'an' let 'em cover thessens wi' their own confusion as wi' a mantle.'"

"Ay," said the brewer to that. "Amen! We'll warm 'em an' all."

No actual warning was administered, however, and no meeting held on the subject—except the one convened by Shep Stevens, that sat for three successive days in the Blue Bell tap-room. Then one morning:

("Noo ye see what ye've done for yessens," said Tankard, suddenly thrusting his crusader's sword in at the Post Office, and impaling Jan Willim and James on it together. . . .)

Government took the matter into its own hands and sent down a mighty inspector-man to smoke penny cigars within the sacred precincts of the office, and subjugate the two

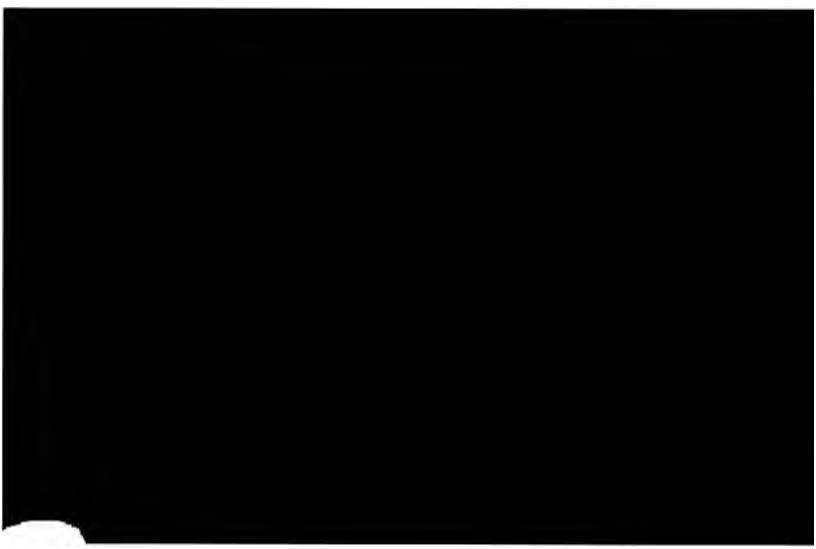
culpables with his lordly bearing. It was his lordly way to stand facing the counter on outstretched legs, with his back propped negligently against the wall and hands in his pockets, watching the sale of stamps, and at such times business in the office was carried on in a whisper. In that tremendous presence, and under the red beam of that official cigar, dawning and fading, dawning and fading, dawning and fading as though it were the head-light at Farnborough, the humility of Jan Willim was something to see, and all Ullbrig went to see it. He moved about with the awful hush for somebody dead in the house; spoke under his breath and without looking at you, lest on catching his eye you might be tempted to forget where you were and nod recognition, or let fall some word about the weather. Stamps stuck to the perspiring fingers that tore them—for all he wiped them diligently on his apron before beginning—and to the fingers that tried to get them off, and to both together, and to the counter. There was no gum left on worth licking when they were levered up with a pen-nib at last—such was the fume of his endeavour to act well before Government. As for postal orders, the strain of executing these with Government looking on proved so great that it all but broke him down. After the third and last he went back into the little clean kitchen, seated himself in the ash-wood arm-chair by the boiler-tap, and made ready to be seized.

things completely, and meant doing it. Finally, on the fourth morning the cigar was gone from its place, and some months later, when even the smell was gone too, Jan Willim received a mighty dossier of instructions that took him a week to spell through; and the new order of things began. James Maskill was no longer to be the sole taskmaster over Ullbrig's deliveries; his power was broken, his dominion scattered. He retained a hand here and a hand there; half the right side of the main street; three-quarters of the left; round by the doctor's; down the hill towards Merensea, and sundry other odd patches of official territory. The rest, as far as Hesketh's corner, with Cliff Wrangham, Shippus, Ganlon, and home again was to be given over into the hands of another, whom, at a weekly stipend of six shillings, Government charged Jan Willim to recommend for the purpose. As soon as he realised, by successive incredulous readings of the instruction, that the sum of six shillings was his to dispose of, he began a conscientious search through his household to see where it might be most deservedly bestowed, and came finally—not without a certain amount of misgiving—to fix his choice on Pam.

"Ah wish noo," he said regretfully, "'at our Willim'd been alive. We could just about done wi' 'im. Bud sin' Lord thought fit to tek' 'im when 'E did, it's not for us to wish 'im back—evens if 'e'd wish to come. Nay, we mun mek best on it we can, wi'oot complainin', an' Gooviment'll 'ave to show us a little consider-A-shun. No doubt a lad'd be better for t' job, so far as looks gans, bud there's no stippilation to sex i' schedule, an' it'd be a pity to let six shillin' gan a-beggin' for t' sake of a pair o' trousers. She's gotten some bonny legs of 'er own, an' a stout 'eart, an' she'll do what she's telt, an' waste no time ower it, an' what more need Gooviment require? There's only one thing 'at bothers me—an' it bothers me a deal—an' that's what General 'ud 'ave to say tiv it if 'e came to know. Ah misdoot 'e'd 'ave seummut to say, an' still . . . six shillin' a week's ower much for a man i' mah position to loss. Ah-sure, it's difficult to know what way to hact for t' best. Onny road, ah s'll 'ave to gan tiv 'is Rivrence an' get 'im to say. Ah want no responsibility to generals nor nawbody else o' *mah* shoulders."

So he called round at the Vicarage first thing before breakfast—that being the customary time for those whose business had kept them awake all night—and hurried back again shortly with a lifted brow to bear the news of Pam's appointment.

"'Is Rivrence says 'at General wouldn't see no objections," he told his wife jubilantly, who came as far as the drawbridge in the counter to greet him, holding a sizzling dripping-tin at its corners through many folds of dish-cloth. "An' she's to 'ave job. Noo ah'm ready for mah breakfast an' all. Where's Pam?—an' let's get 'er telt."



CHAPTER XXI

PAM was just fifteen at the time, and not without her enemies. There were those to whom the fact of her appointment gave less pleasure than to the postmaster, and I will not disguise it —but then, the man or woman that casts no appreciable shadows of enmity must show forth but a miserable light. Pam's eyes made enemies; Pam's teeth made enemies; Pam's lips made enemies—spoke they never so softly, or not at all; Pam's chin made enemies; Pam's hair made enemies; Pam's appointment made enemies.

As soon as the first leakage of the fact that Government was contemplating an addition to the Ullbrig service reached Steg's aunt's ears, she went out on to the doorstep and sang, "Steg!" in a voice like the cracking of a jam-pot, after which she retired complacently to her ironing and left Ullbrig to do the rest.

Ullbrig did it as well as it might be done, and as quickly. Word went round the village from mouth to mouth in no time (with sundry emendations and additions) that Steg's aunt had need of him, and fetched him out ultimately from half-a-score more of his kidney, menacing the roadway before Tankard's by reason of their dangerous inactivity. Ding's was the last mouth in the circuit, and the message lost nothing by that.

"*Thee'll* cop it an' all, Steg," he cried exultantly from afar, aiming a forefinger at him with thumb cocked up as though it were the hammer of a pistol, and keeping his victim well covered while he advanced upon him. "Thy aunt's been lookin' for thee all ower t' place, an' she says she'll gie thee what for when she cops thee. Thee's to gan back at once or thee'll know about it?"

"What's ti been doin', Steg?" asked his fellow highwaymen, gathering round, but Steg only spat on his hands and wiped them morosely in the grass along the roadside.

"T' old divvle," he said. "Ah didn't think she'd 'a took trouble to count 'em."

Then he detached himself suddenly from the party.

"Ah mun away," he said, and set off—with more evidence of speed in his action than in his progress—down the road.

His aunt was on the step as he arrived, and was just about to crack her second jam-pot when she caught sight of him.

"Noo," she said, fixing him with a threatening eye instead, "ye've thought to come back at last, then."

"Ay," said Steg, unostentatiously slipping past her sideways with his hands behind him. The fact that she shut the door on his entrance hardly added to his ease. "Ah didn't think . . ." he began, as he worked round the table, and was going on to add, "'at there was onny 'arm i' tekkin' 'em," but for once his aunt's impatience undid her and saved him.

"Naw. Ye didn't think," she snapped, casting the words at him with such a masterful suggestion of the hand's accompanying them that Steg ducked for it. "Ye nivver do think. Ye're allus to seek when a body wants ye. Where 'ave ye been to, noo . . . wastin' yer time?"

"I' choch (church)" said Steggison, "blawin' orgin for Feythur Mostyn. Ah sewd 'a come sooner, bud ah couldn't get away. Mah wod, my arms aches an' all."

"'E'll 'ave gied ye seummut, then," his aunt charged him, hustling his culminating plaint to one side without regard.

"Nay, not to-day 'e didn't," said the prophet, shuffling his heels. "'E asked me if ah'd let it stan' ower a bit. 'E 'adn't money on 'im."

"Are ye speakin' truth?" demanded his aunt, with a terrible flash of suspicion.

though it were a broken bell-pull. "Ah weean't let 'im rob ye no more if ah've power to stop it. (Gie ower shufflin' wi' yer mucky boots on t' ruddle before ah bat (hit) ye. Floor'll not be a bit no better for all scrubbin' ah've done tiv it.) We'll fin' ye seummut to do o' more consequence nor blowin' choch orgins, an' where ye'll bring seummut back to yer aunt at week end—or she'll know reason why. . . . 'Ow would ye like to wear a postman's cap, noo?"

"Wi' a shiny peak tiv it?" asked Steggison, catching up the suggestion eagerly and letting fall his momentary inquietude like a stolen apple, now he saw the drift of affairs.

"An' a red band round . . . an' stripes down yer breeches," said his aunt, completing the picture; her anger melting before the pride of contemplating her nephew under these altered circumstances. She was proud of Steg—as you would soon see if you went to lay any complaint against him. "An' a letter-bag ower yer shoulders."

"An' gan round wi' 'er of a mornin'?" asked Steg, filled suddenly with a great and unholy rapture, ". . same as James Maskill? . . an' 'ave folks runnin' after me, oot o' breath to know whether ah'd gotten owt for 'em?"

"Ay, an' all," said his aunt, hardly less moved. "'Ow would ye like yon?"

"Ah would that," said Steg, licking his mouth with unction. "Man wod, ah would! Ah'd gie 'em seummut to run for. Ah'd show 'em oo'd gotten letters an' all. They sewdn't be mester o' me, ah'll a-wander."

He was proceeding to enjoy the fruits of his prospective triumph in detail when his aunt—with a sudden return to the present necessities of the business—broke in upon the repast.

"Get yer face weshed," she said authoritatively, "an' come wi' me."

The command had a chilling effect upon the prophet's appetite, as though someone had spilled the ice claret over his trousers.

"It wor weshed ti-morn (this morning)," he said appealingly, passing a lingering hand over it.

"Div y' 'ear me?" demanded his aunt, the rustle about the hem of her skirt betokening a sinister inclination to advance.

"Ay," said Steg briefly, but audibly—that there might be no mistake about it—and disappeared into the scullery.

He emerged shortly after a sound of pumping, turning his sleeves down, and smelling strongly of blue mottled.

[redacted] ears," his aunt
[redacted] interested more in
[redacted] with the friction of a towel
[redacted] the hottest brick he showed
[redacted] She took his head in
[redacted] more than a Dutch
[redacted] for inspection, without
[redacted] seemed uppermost
[redacted] she said severely,
[redacted] like a throw in at foot-
[redacted] ng round yer
[redacted] vessel fer one morn tiv

[redacted] was awarded third-class
[redacted] on his Sunday
[redacted] Betwixt the
[redacted] he inquired
[redacted] Reverence might not
[redacted] so respectably
[redacted] he looked more
like a detected egg-sucker about to be given in charge at the

tion, particularly at this time. "'E's been doin' nowt. An' that's what's matter wi' 'im. It's time 'e did. 'E's ower big to be idle no longer an' gan blawin' choch orgins for them 'at dizzn't mean to pay while they're forced. 'E's just lad ye want."

"What for?" asked the postmaster vaguely—and yet with forbodings.

"For t' new job an' all," she said. "(Stan' up wi' ye!) 'E's a quick lad on 'is legs and smart to larn. (Gie ower lollipin' agen counter before ah fetch ye a bat!) Ye'll 'ave no trouble wi' 'im, an' 'e's gotten a biggish yed of 'is own. 'E'll tek same cap as James—(if not bigger)—bud as big'll do by it's been clapped down a few times. An' 'e can read an' write an' figure. . . ."

"Ah'm sorry to say . . ." began the postmaster, in a constrained, preparatory voice, feeling the thickness of the counter at its edge with both hands, and running them slowly along it in contrary motion as far as they would go, ". . . 'at post ye speak on's been . . . been ootherwise dispawsed on by Gooviment."

"Aw!" said Steg's aunt, after a terrible silence. There were hairpins in her voice, and the postmaster deemed it advisable to stoop less forward over the counter.

"Ay," he said, rubbing his chin awkwardly for words, with a sound of sand-papering, and finding none.

"Ez it?" asked Steg's aunt, accenting the "ez" unpleasantly.

"It ez," he said. Conversation between them seemed thinning away to a sharp end, like the point of a pencil.

"Oo-o-o!" Steg threw in, as much above his breath as he dared. ". . . Ye're 'ottin' (hurting) me"—for his aunt's fingers were biting into his shoulders as though a grapnel had hooked him.

"Say owt agen yer aunt at yer peril," she said, turning fiercely upon him and shaking all the prongs well home. "Ah'll larn ye to answer me back."

"An' 'oo's gotten job, if ye please?" she asked the postmaster grimly.

At that acid "If ye please," his spirit quailed. A sudden veil of official reserve came down upon him.

"Ah've no instrooctions fro' Gooviment to say," he told her cautiously. "Ye'll know i' good time, bud ah mud be gettin' us both into trouble if ah telt ye wi'oot authority. Gooviment's not same to do wi' as owt else, y' understan'. . . ."

[redacted]

[redacted] Sieg's aunt put in
[redacted] so do everybody
[redacted] Even
[redacted] silly
[redacted] pretty fun,
[redacted] lets
[redacted] wax while it

[redacted] amuse that unskilfully
[redacted] Sieg's brief vision
[redacted] and another fighting
[redacted] enemies. Indeed but for
[redacted] and Jan Willim's
[redacted] would have resigned the
[redacted] in favour
[redacted]

[redacted] want to know?"
[redacted] the first place it means when the
[redacted]
[redacted] returned the postmaster,
[redacted] Government 'at's
[redacted] Government 'at's
[redacted]

[redacted] Jan Willim," said

"Is Gooviment to be ruled by a lass, then?" asked the brewer, stirring up sedition with a sneer.

"It's a caution if we'm to 'ave us letters subjeck to control of a wench i' shot skets (short skirts)," said Jevons, who got about two in three years, and sent less if he could help it.

"Gooviment'll soon fin' its mistake," said Mrs. Grazer, ". . . settin' childer ower grown-up people."

"Nay, nay. Gie lass a chance," said the genial Barclay, passing through one morning to Hunmouth market. (It is well he made good use of his opportunity then, for he couldn't have said it for the life of him on his way back.) "There's nowt agen 'er bud yessens. Ah-sure, she's as bonny a lass as ivver trod o' two legs, an' as true; an' ye know it wi'oot me tellin' ye. It diz a body good to look at 'er. She'd not be jealous of 'er last breath if it'd sarve onny on ye owt, an' ye've n' occasion noo to be jealous of 'er six shillin' a week—she'll walk it oot i' shoe-leather very nigh. Some on ye'd do well to gan same road as 'er, an' not gan t'other for contrary's sake. If a body can't be friends wi' Pam it's a body's own fault, an' 'e mun stan' to blame, not 'er. She's all friendship fro' top to toe."

Thus to Ullbrig the genial Barclay, for which—if he had done no other good thing—let us deal kindly with him when next he drives home from market on Saturday with only his boots showing on the seat, singing sentiments of less distinction.

But to Jan Willim he showed a winking eyelid round the Post Office door and cracked his thumb and finger.

"Ye'll be gettin' some custom noo," he said jocosely. "Ye'd best lay in a good supply, Jan Willim. There'll be a fewish stamp-buyers i' office before so long."

And though Barclay, being a humourist, was not exactly the man one would have gone to for the truth (except in an emergency), he supplied it on this occassion. From the very first day that Pam swung the brown canvas bag across her shoulders and set off on her rounds, with Father Mostyn in attendance, to give ecclesiastical countenance to the undertaking and see that no liberties were taken with her position till she was assured enough to withstand them for herself (a thing he did every morning for a week), the fame of her spread increasingly abroad, and the little white-washed Post Office in the main street never looked back. From north and south and west they came to it (less from east because of the sea); from Merensea, from Whivvle, from Garthston, from Sproutgreen, from Ganlon—yes, from Hunmouth even—to buy stamps and chance their pennies for a sight of Pam.

CHAPTER XXII

So Pam grew up in the sight of Ullbrig, variously loved and hated for her self-same virtues; and on a day when the time seemed not yet ripe (for fear some more enterprising spirit might pluck it green), the men of Ullbrig and of Whivvle, and of Merensea and of Garthston, and of Sproutgreen and of Ganlon, and of Hunmouth even, arose, gave a pull to their waistcoats, and took turns at offering themselves before her on the matrimonial altar. That, as you may imagine, made Pam more enemies than ever.

Who the first man was to win the honour of her refusal has not been established on a sufficiently authoritative basis for publication in this volume, but after him came a constant stream of postulants, all struggling to try the effect of their breath on Pam as though she were a pneumatometer at Hunmouth Fair, to be won by sheer blowing. She could

that betrayed the affections of a girl by demeaning her in the sight of another was not worthy to be called man at all; and how, if George didn't care for Rose, he ought never to have soiled his lips with the falsehood of saying he did ("Ay, ah do, bud ah care for you a deal better," said George); and how he ought to try and make himself worthy of Rose, and she of him; and how, if he really felt that that was impossible, he ought to stand forth boldly and proclaim so before it was too late ("Ah'm ready, onnytime ye tell me," said George); but how Pam knew that George was a good fellow at heart ("Ah divn't say there isn't them 'at's as good," said George modestly, "if ye know t' place to look for 'em"); and how, doubtless, he didn't mean any harm ("Ah-sure, ah divn't") and so on . . . much as you've seen it all put in books before, but infinitely more beautiful, because Pam's own dear face was the page, and Pam's lips the printed words; and George stood and watched her with his own lips reforming every word she said, in a state of nodding rapture, as though she'd been scratching the back of his head.

"Gan yer ways on," he begged her, when at last she came to a stop. "Ah can tek as much as ye've got to gie me."

"I've finished," said Pam.

"Ay; bud can't ye think o' onnythink else?" he inquired anxiously. "Ah like to 'ear ye—an' it mud do me some good. Rose couldn't talk i' that fashion, ah'll a-wander. Nay; Rose couldn't talk same as yon. Not for nuts, she couldn't. She's a fond 'un, wi' nowt to say for 'ersen bud, 'Oh, George! gie ower.' What did ye tell me ah 'ad to prawclaim?" he asked, with a crafty attempt to lure Pam on again. "Ah want to mek right sure ah en't forgotten owt."

Whereupon Pam wrought with her wavering brother a second time.

"Ay; it's all right what ye've telt me," he said, in deep-hearted concurrence, when her words drew to an end once more. "Ah know it is. Ye've gotten right pig by t' lug, an' no mistek. . . . Well? What div ye say? Mun ah send my brother to tell 'er ah s'll not be there o' Monday week?"

Pam ground her little heel into the dust for departure, and threw up her head with a fine show of pitying disdain.

"Some day, George Gringle," she told him in leaving, "you may be sorry when you think of this."

"Ah can't be na sorrier nor ah am to-day, very well," George admitted sadly, ". . . if ye mean 'No.'"

"I do," said Pam, with emphasis.

"Well, then," George decided, "there's nowt no more for it. Things'll 'a to gan on as they are."

Which they did.

Any other girl might have been ruined with all this adulation; all these proposals open and covert; all these craning necks; these obvious eye-corners—but Pam was only sorry, and sheer pity softened her heart till many thought she had merely said "No" in order to encourage a little pressing. And indeed, Pam said "No" so nicely, so lovingly, so tenderly, so sorrowfully, so sympathetically, and with so little real negation about the sound of it, that one woke up ultimately with a shock to realise the word meant what it did. Some even found it difficult to wake up at all.

"What div ye keep sayin' 'Naw' for?" asked Jevons, with a perplexity amounting to irritation, when he had asked her to be the mother of two grown-up daughters and a son, ready-made, and Pam had not seen her way. "Ah s'll be tekkin' ye at yer wod, an' then 'appen ye'll wish ye'd thought better on. Noo, let's know what ye mean, an' gie us a plain answer to a plain question. Will ye 'a me?"

"No . . ." said Pam again, shaking her head sorrowfully. Not N-O, NO, as it looks here in print—hard, grim, inexorable, forbidding; but her own soft "No," stealing out soothingly between her two lips like the caress of a hand; more as



"Well," said Jevons himself, stroking down the subject complacently. "Nor ah divn't see rightly i' what way ye sewd. Ah'm a widdiwer—if that's owt agen a man? Bud if it is, ah s'll want to be telt why. An' ah've gotten a family—so it's no use sayin' ah en't. Bud it'll be a caution if there's owt agen a man o' that score. There'll be a deal o' names i' Bible to disqualify for them 'at says there is. An' ah've gotten seummut ah can lay my 'ands on at bank onnytime it rains—though it'll 'a to rain strangelins 'ard an' all before ah do. Ah's think ye weean't say 'at that's owt agen a man?"

"Not a bit," said Pam conciliatorily. And then, with all the steadfast resolution of her teens: "I shall never marry," she told him.

Only girls in their teens—taking life very seriously because of them—ever say that. When they get older they commit themselves to no such rash statement, lest it might be believed.

Ginger's turn took place in the Post Office itself. He had been waiting for it for six weeks, so, of course, being fully prepared, it caught him at a disadvantage when it came. As he slipped into the Post Office his prayer was for Pam, but after he'd got inside and remembered what he'd sworn to do if it were, he prayed it might be the postmaster, until he thought he heard him coming, when his heart sank at another opportunity lost, and he changed the prayer to Pam again. He was still juggling with it from one to the other, with incredible swiftness and dexterity, when there was a sudden ruffle of skirts and Pam stood waiting behind the counter, with her knuckles on the far edge of it, in a delightful transcription of the postmaster's position.

"Well, Ginger," she said, nodding her beautiful head at him. (Ginger being also a surname, it was quite safe to call him by it.) "Do you want a stamp?"

". . . Naw, thank ye. At least . . . ah'm not partic'lar. Ay . . . if ye've gotten one to spare . . ." said Ginger. "Bud ye've n' occasion to trouble about it o' mah account. It's naw consequence, Ah'm not so sure ah could lick it, evens if ye 'ad to gie me it; my mouth's that dry. . . ."

"Let me get you a glass of milk, then," said Pam promptly, showing for departure.

"Nay, ye mun't," Ginger forbade her in a burglar's whisper, waking up suddenly to the alarming course his conduct was taking—as though he had come so far in a dream. "Milk brings me out i' spots i' naw time, thank

ye . . . an' besides, ah can do better wi'out. Wet's comin' back to me noo, ah think, an' ah s'll not want to use stamp while to-morrer, 'appen . . . or day after; if then. 'Appen ah s'll sell stamp to my mother, when all's said and done . . . thank ye. . . . Did ye see what ah did wi' penny? It ought to be i' one o' my 'ands, an' it's not no longer. Mah wod!" He commenced to deal nervous dabs at himself here and there as though he were sparring for battle with an invisible adversary, and one, moreover, he feared was going to prove the master of him. "Ah en't swallered 'er, ah's think. There's a strange taste o' copper an' all. . . ."

"What's that on the counter?" asked Pam.

"Ay . . . to be sure," said Ginger, with a mighty air of relief, picking up the penny and putting it in his pocket. "There she is. . . . Mah wod, if ah'd slipped 'er—she mud 'a been finish o' me. Well. . . ." It suddenly occurred to him that he'd been a tremendous time in the shop delaying Government business, and his teeth snapped on the word like the steel grips of a rat-trap. "Ah'll wish ye good-night," he said abruptly, and made a bolt to go.

"Aren't you going to pay me, Ginger?" Pam asked from across the counter, with the soft simulation of reproach.

"What for?" Ginger stopped to inquire with surprise.

"For the stamp I gave you," said Pam.

kindness, "it's awfully good of you . . . but we've got such lots of them. As many as ever we want and more. You'd better take it, Ginger."

"Ay, gie it me, then," said Ginger, holding his waistcoat pocket open. "'Appen ye weean't mind slippin' it back yessen, an' ye'll know ah've gotten it safe." The little warm waft went over him again, and he shut his eyes instinctively, as though to the passage of a supreme spirit whose glory was too great to be looked upon by mortal man. "Diz that mek us right?" he asked hazily, when the power had gone by, and he awoke to see Pam looking at him.

"Yes," said Pam, feeling it too mean to ask for the penny again after Ginger's recent display of generosity. "That makes us all right, Ginger, thank you."

"Same to you," said Ginger. "Ay, an' many on 'em." Then he knew his hour was come. "Ah want to know . . ." he begged unsteadily, gripping himself tight to the counter's edge, and speaking in a voice that seemed to him to boom like great breakers on the shore, and must be audible to all Ullbrig, let alone the Post Office parlour—though Pam could hardly hear him, "if ye'll remind me . . . 'at ah've gotten seummut . . . to ask ye?"

"I will if I can only remember," said Pam amiably, slipping a plump round profile of blue serge on the counter and swinging a leg to and fro—judging by the motion of her. "When do you want me to remind you, Ginger?"

"Noo, if ye like," said Ginger.

"This very minute?" asked Pam.

"Nay, bud ah think not," said Ginger, backing suddenly in alarm from the imminence of his peril. "It's not tiv a minute or two. Some uvver day, 'appen, when you're not busy."

"Oh, but I'm not busy now," said Pam, stopping her leg for a second at Ginger's recession, and setting it actively in motion again when she spoke, as though to stimulate his utterance.

"Ah'm jealous y' are, though," said Ginger, with a rare show of diffidence at taking her word.

"Indeed I'm not," Pam assured him. "I promise you I'm not, Ginger. Do you think I'd say that to you if I were? Now, what is it you want to ask me?"

"Can ye guess?" Ginger tested her cautiously, with a nervous, twisted smile—intended to carry suggestion, but looking more as though he'd bitten his tongue. Pam thought over him for a moment, and shook her head.

"I'm not a bit of good at guessing," she said.

"'Appen ye'd be cross if ah telt ye," reflected Ginger. "Ay, ah'd better let it alone while ah'm right. Ah mud mek a wuss job on it."

"Oh, Ginger, you aggravating boy," cried Pam, spurring a dear, invisible heel against the counter to urge him on, and slapping the oilcloth with her small flat hand till Ginger's ears tingled again in jealous delight. ". . . Go on; go on. You must go on. You'll have to tell me now, or I'll never be friends with you again—and I shall know you don't care, either."

"Well, then," Ginger began, pushed reluctantly forward by this direful threat, ". . . it's this." He held on to it as long as he could, taking breath, and then when he felt he couldn't hold on any longer, he suddenly shut his eyes and let go, saying to himself, "Lord, help me!" and to Pam, "Will y'ave me?"—so quickly and indistinctly that it sounded like a cat boxed up under the counter, crying "Me-ow."

"Oh, Ginger," Pam apostrophised him mournfully, when she'd begged his pardon three times, and he'd mewed after each one until at the third she'd received the inspiration to know what they all meant. "I wish you'd asked me anything but that."

"There wor nowt else ah'd gotten to ask ye," Ginger said

could only be a hundred Pams instead of just a miserable one, I'd have said 'Yes' to all those that asked me. I know I should. You can't think how it troubles me to have to keep on saying 'No'—but what am I to do? Everybody asks me to marry them . . . at least, a few do . . . and as I can only marry one, I'm frightened it might be the wrong one. It's so easy to make a mistake—unless you're very, very sure. And I'm not; and I feel I might end by making both of us unhappy. . . ."

"Ah'd chance that," said Ginger, with resolution.

"But there ought to be no chance about it, Ginger," Pam reproved him gently. "Nobody ought ever to marry by chance. People that only marry by chance can only hope to be happy by chance—and that's a dreadful idea."

"Ay, ah see it is," said Ginger hurriedly. "Ah beg yer pardon."

"Well, then," said Pam, ". . . you understand me, don't you, Ginger?"

"Ah'm jealous ah do," said Ginger despondently.

"And you're not angry with me . . . for what I've said to you?"

"Nay, ah'm not angry wi' ye," said Ginger. "Ah'm only sorry. Ah misdoot ah s'll not be i' very good fettle for my supper when time comes."

"You'll shake hands, though," said Pam, catching a certain indication that he was about to depart without.

"Ay, ah sewd like, sin' ye're good enough to ask me," Ginger acknowledged eagerly, blundering hold of her finger-tips, and dropping them like hot coals as soon as he felt the desire to linger over them. "'Appen ye'll let me . . . shek 'ands wi' ye . . . noo an' ageean," he asked Pam humbly, turning his coat collar up to go—not that there was any rain at the time, but that the action seemed somehow, in his conception of things, to befit the hopeless finality of departure.

"Whenever you like, Ginger," Pam promised him, with moist lashes.

"Thank ye," said Ginger, making for the door. "Ah divn't know . . . at ah s'll trouble ye so offens . . . bud may'ap it mud save me . . fro' gannin altagether to bad if ah was . . to shak 'em noo an' ageean."

And with a husky farewell he dipped out of the office.

CHAPTER XXIII

So Ginger went over to the great majority of those that loved Pam and lost her, and in his own hour was as sick a man as ever you might wish to meet outside the chapters of a mediæval romance, where gallant knights are wont to weep like women, and women stand the sight of as much blood, unmoved, as would turn the average modern man's stomach three times over. But anything like a complete account of all the hopeless loves that had Pam for their inspiration would crowd the pages of this book from cover to cover, and still leave material for a copious appendix, and any amount of lesser contributory literature. "Pamela Searle: her Time, Life, Love, and Letters," including several important and hitherto unpublished meat-bills rendered to Mrs. Gatheredge by Dingwall Jackson, with a frontispiece. "'Pamela Searle,' being a barefaced attempt to confound the thinking public as much as possible on the subject of this fascinating character, and present her to them in an altogether novel and unreliable

imaginary patient on the Merensea side of Whivvle), and said "No," just the same as she said it to everybody else, with not the least shade of an eyelid's difference because he happened to be a doctor—which was the girl all over. No supplicant that ever supplicated of Pam was too mean or too poor, or too ridiculous or too presuming, in her eyes, ever to be treated with the slightest breath of contumely. When poor Humpy from Ganlon, whose legs were so twisted that he couldn't tell his right from his left for certain without a little time to think, asked a Ganlon lass to have him, she screamed derision at him like a hungry macaw, and ran out at once to spread the news so that it should overtake him (being but a slow walker, though he walked his best on this occasion) before he had time to get home. When he asked Pam to have him, Pam could have cried over him for pity, to think that because God had seen fit to spoil a man in the making like this, human love was to be denied him; and though, of course, she said "No," she said it so beautifully that Humpy could hardly see his way home for the proud tears of feeling himself a man in spite of all; and if, after that, there had been any particular thing in the whole world that twisted legs could have done for a girl, that thing would have been done for Pam so long as Humpy was alive to do it.

Lastly, two years before the Spawer's arrival, the old schoolmaster grew tired of teaching and died, and there came a new one in his place; a younger man, pallid and frail, with the high white student's forehead, worn smooth and rounded like the lamp globe he'd studied under; the weak brown moustache and small chin, and a cough that troubled him when the wind was east, and took up his lodgment at the Post Office. Every day he sat four times with Pam at the same table—breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper. Every morning, when the clock struck ten, he manœuvred over his toes for a sight of the roadway through the school-room window, and if the veins in his forehead swelled and his jaw muscles contracted:

"Ah knaw 'oo yon'll be," went the whisper round behind him.

Once he was ill, drawing the breath into his lungs like great anchor chains dragged through hawse-holes, and Pam nursed him. Dressed the pillows under his head; laid her cool hand on his hot forehead; gave him his medicine; sat through the night with him, clasping courage and comfort and consolation into his burning fingers; wrote letters for him; read for him. "Noo we s'll be gettin' telt seummut before so

long," said Ullbrig to itself. "A jug gans to pump a deal o' times, bud some fond lass'll brek it before she's done"—but the schoolmaster consumed in stillness like the flame of a candle. There were days when "Good morning, Yes, No, Please, Thank you, and Good-night" would have covered all that he said to Pam directly—and even then the veins in his forehead and the tightening muscles about his jaws reproved him straightway, as though he had already said too much. If, by any chance, Pam addressed him suddenly, the blood would mount up to his forehead and the outlines of his face would harden, like a metal cast in the setting, before he spoke, till it almost looked as though he were debating whether he should give her any reply. And the reply given, he would take the first opportunity of turning his back. Indeed, there were times when he barely waited for the opportunity, but clipped his sentence in the middle and threw an abrupt word over his shoulder to complete the sense of it, while Pam stood sorrowfully regarding the two familiar threadbare tail buttons and the shine about the back of the overworked morning coat, whose morning knew no noon, wondering if she'd said anything to offend him. Once, when he had swung round more abruptly than usual, giving her the reply so grudgingly that it fell altogether short of her hearing, as though he had cast a copper to some wayside mendicant for peace' sake, Pam—who could never bear to leave anything in doubt that a word might settle

he was never a man of so few as when he was with her. He had words for the postmaster; he had words for the postmaster's wife; he had words for Emma; he had words—stray, detached, pedagogic schoolroom words, read up aloud from the chalkings on an invisible blackboard—for the villagers. But for Pam—Pam saw herself—he had only the constrained, hard words between his teeth like the enforced bit of a horse, that he champed fretfully in the desire to break away from her.

No. Pam knew what it was. He liked the postmaster because they could talk the papers over together, and predict terrible things about the country to each other; and he liked Emma because Emma was so straightforward and sensible and earnest-looking—even if she wasn't pretty, which perhaps, after all, she wasn't—and never said silly things she didn't mean; and he liked Mrs. Morland because nobody could help liking her—she was so kind and motherly and sympathetic and talkative, and so full of allowances for other people. But Pam! . . . Well, he didn't care about Pam because . . . oh, because of heaps of things, perhaps. It wasn't any use trying to put them all together. Because he thought she was a silly, empty-headed gad-about, who cared for nothing but showing herself around the countryside . . . (but that wasn't true a bit; he knew it wasn't!) . . . and being asked if she'd have people. . . .

As though Pam could help that.

Perhaps he thought she could.

And perhaps . . . he thought she even . . .

But that was too dreadful!

. . . He wanted Pam to see.

Oh, no, no, no, no. NO! He couldn't think so meanly of her as that!

. . . But whose fault was it if he did?

But he couldn't. Indeed he couldn't. He couldn't think so meanly of her as that!

. . . But whose fault was it if he did?

No, no . . . whose fault? Oh, could it be *her* fault? No, no. Could it?

And Pam doubled up one little hand in anguish, and clasped it in the other as though it were a hot potato, and pressed them both against her breast as you have seen poor children do in winter for warmth (though none poorer than poor Pam at this moment), and stared at an invisible something in front of her—that seemed to be a bogey by the

startled look she gave it — with a bitten underlip twisting and struggling like a red live thing to be free; and a drawn grey cheek—till the great round tear-drops gathered in her eyes and fell hotly on her knuckles one by one.

But that was only for a moment.

Then Pam dashed the tears aside and shook her glorious head with new-found resolve. Pam would be brave; and strong; and steadfast; and still; and modest; and nobly feminine; and true. And would show him by her actions that he had done her a wrong in his heart.

Pam was still engaged upon the work of showing him when the Spawer took up his quarters at Cliff Wrangham.

CHAPTER XXIV

On the morning following the Spawer's session at Father Mostyn's, before James Maskill had yet flung himself round the brewer's corner, his Reverence threw open the blistered Vicarage door and sallied forth genially to the Post Office in a pair of well-trodden morocco slippers, screwing up his lips to inaudible cheery music as he went, and holding in his left hand a round roll of grey stuff which, judging by wristbands of a similar texture that showed beyond the crinkled cassock sleeves, appeared to be a reverend flannel shirt. Jan Willim was chalking their price on a pair of virgin soles when he heard the insidious slip-slap of heelless leather take the cobbles like the lipping of an advancing tide, and he put his head hurriedly round the little clean kitchen door at the sound of it.

"Noo, 'ere's 'is Rivrence," he announced, with the loud double-barrelled whisper intended to do duty as a shout on the one side and be inaudible on the other, " . . . an' it'll be Pam 'e's after. . . . Noo, Pam lass!"

"Ha! The very girl I wanted to see," his Reverence told her, as Pam slipped her frank face deftly behind the counter to receive him, like a beautiful honest marguerite, fresh plucked and button-holed, with a friendly upward "Yes-s-s?" prolonged through her ivory petals, pink-tipped, and a peep of rosy tongue. "The very girl! How's Government this morning, John?" he inquired obliquely of the deferential shadow brooding by the inner door, where the sound of straining shoe leather bespoke the presence of somebody striving to keep silence on his toes.

"She's very well, ah think, yer Rivrence, thank ye," responded the postmaster, stepping forward the necessary six inches to show himself respectfully before the Vicar in the act of speaking, and retiring when his words were ended.

"Busy, is she?" asked his Reverence affably, commencing to unroll the grey bundle of flannel on the counter with a leisurely ordering of his hands—Pam lending assistant touches here and there.

"Ay, she's busy," said the postmaster, showing again in the

door-frame, and wiping his fingers on his apron, lest their inactivity might seem like disrespectful indolence before the Vicar. "Bud it'll be slack time wi' 'er an' all before long. Theer's not so many stamps selt i' 'arvest by a deal, nor so many letters written. Folks is ower throng i' field."

"Ha! No doubt about it. The harvest field is a fine corrective for *cacoethees scribendi*," said his Reverence, disposing the shirt on the counter lengthwise, with limp, outstretched arms, for Pam's inspection, as though it were some subject on an operating table. "Buttons again, you see, Pam," he told her, pointing out where they lacked.

"My word, I see!" said Pam, running over the outlines of the article with a swift, critical eye. "And wristbands and collarbands as well. You want some new shirts badly. You've only four now, with the one you've got on—and that," she said, turning up his cassock sleeves to get a look at it, "is almost past mending. See how thin it is."

She held the deposited shirt against the light, and worked her two forefingers cautiously behind it to show the stuff's attenuation.

"Ha!" said Father Mostyn, regarding the transparency with musing. "That comes of rebating tithes. If his reverence the vicar didn't rebate tithes he could wear as stout a shirt as the people that get 'em rebated. There's a lesson for you.

and following every move of her hands with a fascinating agreement of head, ". . . or plain white?"

"Ha! Plain white . . . by all means," said Father Mostyn. "Large plain white for his reverence the vicar—as large and as plain and as white as we can get 'em, that lie flat where they fall, and don't run all over the floor to try and find the crack in the skirting board. Pearl buttons are for the young and flexible (incidentally too, for the profane), and not for aged parish priests, whose knees are stiffened with a life of kneeling. . . . Shirts and pearl buttons mustn't let me forget, though," he admonished himself, drawing the solitary, backless cane-bottomed chair under him from below, and sitting to the counter with one hand drumming on its oilcloth and the other gripping a spindle, "what I really came about."

"No," said Pam, watching his lips.

"We had a visit from our friend of the Cliff End last night."

Pam's eyes were drawn for a moment to sundry faults in the folding of the shirt, and her fingers busied themselves with their correction.

"Yes," she said, looking up again. "But you didn't have any music? . . . Did you?" she asked, with the sudden eagerness for a coveted opportunity gone by.

"All in good time—all in good time, dear child," Father Mostyn exhorted her indulgently. "Last night we made music with our mouths, but the next night we're going to make a little with our fingers. Bach! Scarlatti! Beethoven! Mozart! Schumann! Palestrina! . . . And then we shall have to have you with us."

"Me?" asked Pam, with swift, desirous incredulity.

"You," said Father Mostyn.

Pam plunged her face into her two hands straightway (which was a characteristic trick of hers at such times), as though the beauty of this thing were too great to behold. After a moment she let her fingers slide away into her lap of their own weight and threw back a brave head with the smile of tears about it, and the little double shake that remained over to her from the short while ago when her hair had fallen in sleek, black curtains on either side of her cheeks each time she stooped.

"Does he know I'm to be there?" she inquired.

"To be sure he does, dear child."

"But it was your idea . . . to ask me," said Pam.

"It was my vicarage," said Father Mostyn.

Pam made pot-hooks with her fingers.

"Yes . . ." she said, as though the word were only the beginning to a puzzled objection, but her breath went out in it in lingering, and she let it stand by itself as an assent. "What did he say?"

"When?"

"When you told him . . . I was to be there? Perhaps he didn't say anything?"—with anxiety. "Did he?"

"And supposing he didn't?"

"Then perhaps it would mean he didn't want me. And perhaps it wouldn't . . . but it might."

"Ha! Might it? Let's make our mind easy, dear child. He said lots of things."

"About me?"

"Certainly. It was you we were discussing."

There was only one question possible to ask after this on the direct line, and Pam drew up short, confronting it with a sudden air of virtue.

"I don't want to know what they were," she said.

"There's no earthly reason why you shouldn't," Father Mostyn told her suavely, "so far as that goes."

"Isn't there?" asked Pam; and then quickly: "Of course. I didn't think there would be. Why should there?"

"No, no," said Pam. "Not if he didn't want. But he never went . . . anywhere before. And now he'll laugh."

"In church? . . . I think not."

"When he gets outside."

"Why should he laugh when he gets outside?"

"Because. . . . Oh!" Pam twisted her fingers. "Because of me."

"And why, pray, because of you?"

"Oh . . . because. . . . Not because you haven't taught me properly, because you have, and been clever and kind, and more painstaking than I deserved . . . ever. But because . . . what must my playing sound like to him, when he plays so beautifully?"

"Pride, dear child, pride!" Father Mostyn cautioned her with uplifted finger. "Let's beware of our pride. The Ullbrig pride that can't bear the humiliation of being taught."

"I'm sure I try," said Pam penitentially.

"Let's try harder, then," said his Reverence, with affable resolve. "Never let's cease trying to try harder. The laughter you speak of is most assuredly a miasma rising from the deadly quagmires of your own pride. If our playing merits the fate of being laughed at, why should we wish it to receive any better fate, or fear its receiving its just deserts. Isn't that a virulent form of Ullbrig hypocrisy?"

"I didn't mean it to be hypocrisy," said Pam sadly. "And I didn't think it was till you showed me. Only . . . somehow . . . I can't help it. I seem to be growing more and more into a hypocrite every day."

"Ha!" said Father Mostyn, welcoming the admission. "So long as we recognise the sin, and the nature and the degree and the locality of it . . . and have strength to confess it, dear child, salvation is still within our clasp. It's only in sinning without knowing it that the deadliness lies. And that's what the Church Catholic is to protect us from. . . . Ha! Are you listening, John?"

"Ah catch seummut o' what's bein' said, yer Rivrence," the postmaster acknowledged cautiously, manifesting a certain diffidence about showing himself to this appeal, ". . . bud ah'm not listenin' if it's owt 'at dizzn't consarn me."

"The Catholic Church," Father Mostyn instructed him solemnly, "concerns all men—even shoemakers—and you would be well advised to catch as much of what you hear her saying as you can. Truth may come to us some day by

keeping our ears open to her, but be sure she won't come to us without."

"Ah expeck she weean't," said a depressed voice from the shoemakery. "Thank ye."

"You're welcome, John. And now"—Father Mostyn turned to Pam in lighter vein—"enough of spiritual meats for our souls' digestion, dear child. Far from laughing at you, as your little momentary lapse from discipline permitted you to imagine, our Cliff End friend was most genuinely interested in your musical welfare; inquired diligently concerning your state of proficiency; whether you conformed, as was desirable, to slurs, rests, dotted notes, repeats, legato, due pedale, ben marcato il basso, senza repetizione, da capo . . . and so forth; whether your expression was pure, lucid, and free from unwholesome exaggerations; whether I had laid due stress on the necessity for your observing strict time (the stricter the better), with a full regard to the key signature (which, dear child, as you know, have always been among my most earnest contentions with you) . . . whether your sense of rhythm was properly based according to the precepts of the old masters; what acquaintance you had with the theory and practice of harmony, of contra punctum, figured bass, fugue, canon, punctum organum—of the whole fabric and structure of music, in a word. . . ."

"Does a helping hand . . . mean lessons?" she asked, in a still, small voice, after the humbug had settled down.

"Ha! Not so fast; not so fast," Father Mostyn reproved her. "I feared what my words might induce. Let's beware of the fatal trick of jumping at conclusions. Apart altogether from its more immediate (and frequently disastrous) consequences, the trick has a disturbing effect upon our spiritual equilibrium at large, tending to stimulate an unwholesome appetite for excitement of all sorts, and lure us from the contented level of established truth. It does not appear at present what a helping hand, in its strictest interpretation, may mean. You see . . . we've got to remember . . . our friend isn't like the common ruck of 'em. Not a bit of it. A different class altogether. You can't mistake the signs. No mere bread-and-cheese musician, dependent on the keyboard for his sustenance, but a dilettante . . . a professional patron of the muse, so to speak, who isn't solely concerned with its sordid side of pounds, shillings, and pence. I told him he'd have to let us feed him the next time he came to see us. Not dine him . . . but feed him. And he seemed to cotton to the idea. So now, dear child, what are we going to do about it?"

"Oh!" Pam pressed a hand flat to each cheek and fastened a look of round-eyed, incredulous delight on Father Mostyn's face. "Is it to be a party?"

"Ha! Not altogether a party." Father Mostyn pursed up his lips dubiously over the word. "Let's beware of confusions in our terms, dear girl. Not a party, but a . . . ha! . . just exactly what I told you it was when I spoke about it. A feed. That's the word. Nothing set or fixed or formal. Not a dinner—dinner's a civilised institution we leave behind us when we come to Ullbrig. No, no; not a dinner. A feed. That's what it's to be. A feed."

"Yes," said Pam, sticking close to the suggestion as though she were afraid of losing it, and nodding her head many times with an infinity of understanding. "I know. A feed. What sort of a feed?"

Father Mostyn's judicial eyebrow shot up like the empty end of a see-saw.

"That's what we've got to settle. I rather fancied. . . . You see—the weather's so hot . . . we must consider. My idea was . . . I thought, perhaps . . . we'd have something rather cooling. Something, say, in the nature of a cold spread. . . . But anything you like, dear child," he allowed her.

"Just think out for yourself—when I've gone—the very best you can do for us, and we'll subscribe to it in success or failure when the time comes. And now, let's settle when the time's to be. When can we manage it, think you?"

"To-night? . . were you thinking of?" said Pam.

"Ha!" Father Mostyn wagged his hands free of all part in the proposal. "I was thinking of nothing. But to-night's a little too precipitate, dear child. Let's learn to have a proper appreciation of the fitness of things informal. For instance, to go drumming our friend up for a feed at the Vicarage that was only the subject of conversation with him for the first time some hours ago, would be an act lacking all the essentials of courtesy and *delicatesse* — bordering almost on impropriety. In the first place, it would assume an impetuousness in our desire to establish intimate relations with him which might prejudice us gravely in his eyes, and lead him to speculate somewhat unpleasantly as to our ulterior motives. Or, in the second place, it might appear that our desire for cultivating the acquaintance was based on no more than his promise to make music for us, and that we were snatching the first opportunity of having it redeemed—an odious form of distrust, so to speak, comparable to the premature presentment of an I.O.U. On the other hand, if we suggest the day following every requirement of hospitality

Thereupon James brushed past the reverend cassock buttons with a grunt like a felled ox, that might have been apology or anathema, or neither, and brought down the post-bag on the counter like the muffled thud of a giant boxing-glove, well delivered.

"No," said Pam, when she'd taken it from him with a smiling nod of recognition and thanks, and run its contents deftly under her fingers. "There's nothing for further than Stamway's this morning."

"And nothing for his Reverence?"

Pam ran over the letters again before his Reverence's eyes, to show him that she wasn't merely making use of the word "No" to save her a little trouble, and shook her head.

"Ha! Capital! capital!" said his Reverence, preparing to go. "At least, it means there's nobody petitioning for new drain-pipes or a cow-shed roof by this post."

"Ay," pronounced the postman darkly after him, watching the retreating shoulders with an explosive face like a fog-signal. "Yon sod ought to 'ave 'is dommed neck screwed round an' all."

"Sh! James, James, James!" cried Pam, biting a lip of grieved reproof at him across the counter, and seeking to melt his hardness with a sorrowing eye. "How can you bear to say such wicked things?"

"Ah sewd run after 'im an' tell 'im o' me, if ah was you," James taunted her, free of any anxiety that the challenge might be accepted. "'E weean't 'a gotten so far."

"You know very well I wouldn't do it," said Pam.

"Ah know nowt about what ye'd do," James denied obstinately, shaking admission away from him like raindrops gathered on the brim of his cap-shade. "Nor ah don't care."

"You know very well I wouldn't do that, anyhow," said Pam, with a trembling lip for the injustice. "And it's wrong of you to say I would."

"Ah know ah'm a bad 'un," said James. "Let's 'a my letters an' away."

"You're not a bad one," Pam protested, with a more trembling lip than ever, "but you try to make people think you are. And some of them believe you."

"They can think what they like. Folks is allus ready to believe owt bad about a man," said the postman bitterly, "wi'oot 'im tryin'. Ah sewd 'ave seummut to do to mek 'em think t'other road, ah'll a-wander, ne'er mind whether ah tried or no. Nobody's gotten a good wod for me."

"*I've* got a good word for you," said Pam.

There was silence over the postman's mouth for a moment, and in that moment his evil genius prevailed.

"Ye can keep it, then," he said ungraciously, swinging on his heel. "Ah nivver asked ye for it."

And the silence was not broken again after that. Pam went on sorting her letters steadily, but every now and then she turned her head to one side of the counter, and for each stamp on the envelope there were a couple—big, blurred, swollen, and rain-sodden, with a featureless resemblance to James Maskill about them—that danced before her eyes.

Only, later in the day, when there was no postmaster to prejudice matters with his presence, Pam heard James Maskill whistling the Doxology outside the door with his heel to the brickwork, and she slipped round and took him prisoner by his coat lappels.

"James . . ." she said softly, and the Doxology stopped on the sudden, as dead as the March in Saul. "You didn't . . . mean it, did you?"

The postman dropped his eyelids to their thinnest width of obstinacy, and said nothing. Pam waited, looking persuasively at his great freckles (so unlike her own), and still holding him up against the brickwork, as though he were Barclay, in need of it on Saturday night."

brickwork together, but this second time his good genius conquered.

". . . Do," he said, with his eyes quite shut; and Pam let go the lappels.

"I knew you did," she said, but without any sting of exultation about the words—only pride for the man's own victory—and went back to her work again (which had reference to hard-boiled eggs and chickens) with a brightened faith in the latent goodness of humanity.

And when James was standing on the cobbles before the Post Office that night, loosing the knot in his reins prior to departure, Pam slipped out with a neat little parcel done up in butter paper, and put it into his hands.

"Ay, bud ye're ower late," said the postman tersely, with no signs of the recent softening about him, and sought to press it back upon her. "Bag's made up."

"But it isn't for the bag," said Pam, resisting the transfer. "It's for you, James."

"What's it for me for?" demanded the postman, with the old voice of ire.

"To eat," said Pam. "It's a chicken pasty I made on purpose for you, with a savoury egg and a sponge sandwich. The egg's in two halves with the shell off, and it's quite hard. You can eat it out of your fingers if you like. I thought they'd be nice for your tea."

The postman exchanged the parcel from hand to hand for a while, as though he were weighing it, slipped it after deliberation under the seat, gathered the reins, gripped the footboard and splasher, pulled them down to meet him, treading heavily on the step, till the whole cart appeared to be standing on its side, and rocked up into place with a send-off that looked like shooting him over the saddler's chimney. For James Maskill to thank anybody for anything was an act of weakness so foreign to his nature that there were few in all the district who could accuse him of it; and from the present signs Pam did not gather she was to be among the number.

"Good-bye, James," she said wistfully, stepping back from the wheel as he sat down—for James Maskill's starts were sudden and fearful events, not unattended with danger to the onlooker, " . . . and I hope you'll like them."

"Kt, Kt!" was all James vouchsafed (and that not to Pam) out of a threatening corner of his mouth; but as the bay mare leaned forward to the traces, and Pam gave him up utterly for lost, he turned a quick, full face upon her.

"Good-neet . . . an' thank ye," he said. And in a smothered voice that seemed to issue from under the seat, turning back again: "Ah'll try my best."

Then he set his teeth and brought the whip down hissing venomously, as though desirous to get clear of the sound of his own words and weakness. The bay mare sprang up into the sky like a winged Pegasus, taking James Maskill and the trap along with her, and before Pam's eye could catch on to them again, they were gone in a cloud round the brewer's corner.

CHAPTER XXV

THEN for two days there were six very busy girls in Ullbrig—busier, indeed, than any other six girls in the world, I think, and their name was Pam. They cooked things in the little clean kitchen that gave forth a savour like all the fleshpots of Egypt; things that turned Jan Willim's nostrils sideways in his head through trying to smell them from the shoemakery at work with his head down, and elicited a constant sound of snuffling outside the Post Office as of pigs that prize their snouts under the stye door at feed time. They went abroad with baskets, whose white napkins Ullbrig's fingers itched to lift, and pushed open the blistered Vicarage door without knocking, and passed in. They were seen to pay calls at Mrs. Fussitter's, and then Ullbrig sent bonnetless emissaries after them, with their bare arms wrapped up in harden aprons, to inquire:

"Ye've 'ad Pam wi' ye just noo, en't ye? . . . Ay, ah thought y'ad. Ah thought ah seed 'er. . . . Ah's think she'd nowt to say for 'ersen, 'ad she?"

You may judge, then, if Pam was busy.

But in the end the things that had to be done were done, and the appointed hour came to pass, and Pam slipped through the Vicarage door with the final basket, and did not emerge again, and the shutters were drawn in both windows.

("Ay . . . see ye . . . look there! . . . If ah didn't think they would," said Mrs. Fussitter, when all hope had gone with the second. "They weean't let onnybody tek a bit o' interest i' them, ah-sure. Ah mud just as well 'a gotten on wi' my work nor waste time ower them 'at dizzn't thank ye.")

And lastly, the Spawer rode down from Dixon's when the dusk was falling, to enjoy the ripe fruits of all this preparation. They heard the sound of his bell, percolating the stillness from Hesketh's corner like a drop of cool musical rain, and Pam said: "Here he is," in a whisper, almost awestruck, and bit her nails between her white teeth with a sudden enlargement of eye, as though they'd been lying in wait for a burglar all this time, and the burglar had come.

And for a moment her heart failed her. She didn't know what to do. For how was she there? Why was she there? By what right was she there? What folly or blind presumption had led her to be there? Why had she ever consented to be there?

Suppose it was all a mistake, after all, and he didn't really expect her. What would happen then? What should she do if his face dropped discernibly when she showed herself, and he became cold?

Oh, he would be terrible cold.

And what would he be thinking of if his thoughts made him look like that? Would he be thinking of the same things as the schoolmaster?

Oh, no, no, no! Would he?

Would he turn his back upon her, and talk over her to Father Mostyn as though she were a mere wooden palisade? What if she *was* a lady, as Father Mostyn found necessary to remind her at times when she didn't act like one? How was he to know that?

And even if he did know it, what did it matter? If the thing itself was wrong to start with, how was it bettered because a lady did it?

Besides . . . she wasn't a lady.

She knew very well she wasn't. She was just the post-girl.

trouble—particularly girls; and Pam was only a girl, we are to remember.

Perhaps she didn't exactly pray so much as think aloud in her thoughts, so that God might hear His name and listen to her if He would. Very quickly and earnestly, and without any stops at all, as though the words had been in her great heart to start with, and she'd just turned it upside down. And no sooner had they turned out than she heard the Spawer's two feet strike the ground outside like a dotted crotchet and a quaver in a duple bar as he jumped from his bicycle, and heard Father Mostyn throw open the front door and say "Ha!" and the Spawer give him back sunny greeting in his familiar voice of smiles (that she seemed to know almost as well as her own—if not better), and immediately her fear left her as though it had never been; and she knew he was expecting her and would be glad to see her, and had come more on her account than on his own, and would put out his hand as soon as ever he saw her, and smile friendship; and her appetite for this joyous double feast returned.

Then she threw up her head and shook it, and slipped out into the hall (she'd been standing out of sight in the door-frame during her momentary disquietude), with her lips a little apart as though for the quickened breathing of eagerness that has been a-running, and her white teeth glistening between like the pure milk of human kindness, and her cheeks aflush with the transparent golden-pink of a ripening peach, and her head thrown back, and her chin tilted forward, and her two eyes gazing forth—each under an ineffable half-width of lid; and nobody a penny wiser about the prayer—not even Father Mostyn apparently.

Though you never know.

"Ha! Come in; come in," all his time seemed taken up in saying, walking backward before the Spawer's advancing bicycle, and scooping him seductively into the Vicarage portals with the comprehensive arms of a showman. "I judged we should find you not so far away. Capital! capital! And the bicycle too. Come along inside and let's manifest our pride to you. That's what we want you for. To manifest our pride. We've heaps of it to show you to-night.

"Take stock of our lamp. Ha! the glory makes you blink. That's better than the reprehensible Ullbrig habit of carrying lighted candles with us to see who's at the front door, and setting our guests on fire while we shake hands; or inviting 'em into darkness and bidding 'em stand still and

break nothing until we've got the shutters up and can strike a match. Tell Archdeaconess Dixon when you get back that his reverence has a twenty-four candle power lamp lavishing its glory in the hall—just for shaking hands and hanging your hat up by—it'll do her good to know. Beautiful! beautiful! And the flags. Keep your feet moving on 'em all the time; they're still damp. That's what brings the geometrical pattern out so strikingly. Pride and rheumatic affections are preferable to hygiene, you see. Let our friends come and covet the design of our flagstones (the only ones in the district), and go forth stricken in both legs. That's the way.

". . . Pam, dear child!" He laid a paternal hand upon her shoulder—not upon the shoulder that was nearest to him, but the shoulder that was farthest away—with his arm encompassing her neck; partly as a happy illustration of the affectionate degree of intimacy on which she stood with him, to give the Spawer the keynote for his own conduct, as it were—(as though that were necessary!)—partly also, the Spawer thought, because he liked doing it, and the occasion seemed too good to be lost, and brought her forward in manner of presentation. At which the Spawer, who had already been passing his recognitions to her over Father Mostyn's shoulder, leaned across the bicycle and shook hands with her to her heart's content in his own happy fashion—a

—and lots of other things like that, that Pam could understand as easily with her hand in his as though they'd been spoken through a telephone. Then Father Mostyn startled them with a sudden "Ha!" launched terribly into the outer darkness at the end of his finger, succeeded by a scuffle of fugitive boots, and shut the door; and the bicycle went into its old place under the hat pegs, opposite to the ecclesiastical oak bench, on which now was displayed a beautiful garland of wild roses—part of James Maskill's gift to Pam this morning, because she'd happened to mention to him yesterday that she wanted some wild flowers very badly; but of course she didn't suppose James would know where there were any (would he?) or have time to gather them if he did. And James did; though he said "Naw, not 'im," at the moment, not being yet in receipt of the savoury egg and the chicken pasty and the strawberry sandwich. But after he'd eaten these at home, and sat for a while on his chair in blessed retrospection, with his waistcoat and the two top buttons of his trousers undone, holding his fingers dovetailed over his shirted stomach and twiddling his thumbs, he rose like a man resolved to murder, banged his cap on again, and gave all the remaining light of that evening (about two and a half hours of it) to Pam's service.

"Aren't they lovely?" said Pam, catching the Spawer's glance upon them on its way from the bicycle, and eager to gather toll of commendation for James Maskill before it should have gone too far by. "Just smell them," and she showed him the way. "Oh, I could go on smelling them for ever. James Maskill brought them for . . . for us, all the way from Sproutgreen. Wasn't it good of him? Because I never asked him"—and honestly Pam didn't think she had—"but he got to know I wanted some for to-night, and so he brought them. He's awfully kind-hearted."

"Ha!" Father Mostyn wagged cordial hands of invitation towards the roses with a gesture of making haste to fulfil some forgotten act of hospitality, as the Spawer's face followed where Pam's seductive freckles had been. "Beautiful! beautiful! By all means. That's it. Smell 'em—another of our prides. If anything a more glorious pride than the rest of 'em. Dog roses from Sproutgreen—*Rosæ Caninæ Sproutgreenienses*—presented to Pamela and his reverence the vicar with James Maskill's respectful compliments—who's never been known to give anything (except offence) within the memory of man. Tell Archdeaconess Dixon that when you get back, and see

what she says. She'll say it's one of his reverence's Popish inventions. Depend upon it. That's what she'll say. One of his reverence's Popish inventions.

". . . Ha!" He wrung his nose with rare satisfaction between thumb and knuckles, and waltzed the well-known genial bear-dance over a two-feet area of flags. "But, Pam, dear child," stopping his measure on a sudden and patting her elbow remindingly, ". . . don't let's be blinded by our rosaceous pride. How's the table getting on? Ready to sit down to, is she?"

Then he turned to the Spawer.

"You've brought your appetite with you, Wynne?" he charged him, with solicitous interrogation.

"All there is of it," the Spawer affirmed pleasantly. "They advised me to up at the Cliff (if it's not betraying confidences)." A rendering of the vernacular less literal, perhaps, than elegant. "Noo, ye'll get some marma-lade!" had been Miss Bates' reflection on the subject. ". . . So I've been keeping it up to concert pitch all day."

"Ha! Concert pitch; concert pitch." Father Mostyn threw up significant eyebrows, repeating the words to Pamela, magnified large for her comprehension through a meaning whisper, and screwing his mouth over them at the conclusion like the red round seal of sagacious silence, to the solemn

CHAPTER XXVI

Ah! but that was a feed to remember. The glorious, never-to-be-forgotten first of many of its kind. Feeds there have been, I suppose, and feeds there will be; feeds in haste and feeds at leisure; feeds formal and feeds informal; feeds of plenty and feeds of insufficiency; hundreds and thousands of feeds of all sorts and sizes and circumstances that go to make the calendar of a man's years; the bulk forgotten, some dimly recalled; others remembered in composite, being merely the typified average of a long series of similars; a few—not more than half-a-dozen, perhaps, at most, it may be, or less than that—red lettered in our life for an abiding memorial; but none, surely, more enduringly inscribed or more tenderly to be looked back upon in the days that should follow than this of which my pen is trying to tell the story, behind the drawn shutters of his Reverence's room.

The same old room it was in which the Spawer had sat with Father Mostyn two nights ago, but you could never have known it without being told. There was no longer any need to walk like a prisoner in shackles, sliding one foot past the other for fear of treading on crockery, or balancing outstretched arms as you went against the dizzy inclination to sit down. A couple of Daniel Lamberts abreast could have made a clean turn of it now, and not troubled to squeeze themselves much at corners. All the things by the side of the wall and the skirting-board (including the cobwebs) were either gone or unrecognisably reduced; cunningly compressed into semblances of Chesterfields and ottomans and settees, and draped with what looked like antimacassars—and were not even that. And all elsewhere about the room were traces of Pam's taste and explorative industry; everything that had a good side to show showed it, and even those that hadn't had been coaxed by Pam's alluring fingers into looking as though they had.

You may guess if the Spawer tried politely to make believe he didn't notice any change in the room.

But the crowning glory of the place and of all Pam's

achievements—it was the table. Four candles lighted it and a brass lamp, and they were every one lighted to start with. There was a chicken-pie in a Mother Hubbard frill, with its crust as brown as a hazel-nut, and just nicely large enough to feed half-a-dozen, which is a capital size for three; and a noble sirloin of beef, fringed with a hoary lock of horse-radish, and arching its back in lonely majesty on an oval arena of Spode, like the complete beast himself—a perfect miniature of the gladiatorial bull; and there was a salad, heaped up high under the white and yellow chequer of sliced eggs, and a rosy tomato comb, in a glorious old oaken bowl as big as a kettle-drum, china-lined, bound with three broad hoops of silver and standing on three massive silver claws; and there were some savoury eggs, deliciously embowered in their greenery of mustard and cress, and a tinned tongue, tissue-papered in white and red, and garnished with stars and discs and crescents as though it had never known what it was to sleep in darkness in an air-tight tin under Fussitter's counter; and some beetroot, brimming in a blood-red lake of vinegar; and whipped creams, and a trifle pudding, all set out on snowy white damask amid an arctic glitter of glass and silver and cutlery. Except the cheese, which was a Camembert, and went by itself on the grained side-cupboard, where all the tumblers and wine-glasses had been congregated before.

fearlessly, after the manner of one who had nothing to be ashamed of, looking into the Spawer's eyes without flinching, first of all, and thence to the very gates of Heaven over his shoulder and crossed herself, and lifted her clear, bell-like voice in pronouncement, and said:

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

Whereupon Father Mostyn crossed himself too—with easy familiarity, as though he were sprinkling surplus snuff off his fingers; being a priest, and in the profession, so to speak—his neck stretched out the while like that of a Christmas Eve turkey, and his nose thrown up raptly over the beef; after which he let his serviette slip through his knees, and took hold of both arms of his chair, and flung himself recklessly out over them at right angles, first to one side of the table and then to the other, in bland survey, like Punch delivering his immortal gallows oration, and said:

"Pam, dear child. . . . What are you giving us?" as though Pam had not reiterated every dish to him half-a-dozen times that very night.

". . . There are the herrings," she suggested, assuring herself by a sight of them, with a hopeful slant of inquiry for his Reverence's approval.

"Ha!" Father Mostyn cast up recognisant eyes to Heaven as though he had not understood this signal act of mercy to form one of the items of Pam's grace, and must needs now add a special acknowledgment. "Beautiful! beautiful! Pass them along, dear child. A plebeian fish at three a penny, but one of many virtues, whose sole faults lie in its price and name. Fortunately, those are faults not likely to affect the epigastrium. Wynne, my boy." He received the dish from Pam's fingers and transferred it magnificently over the roast beef to the Spawer's side of the table; a gesture that made rare caviare of it at once, ". . . let me persuade you. Herring olives prepared according to the recipe of my late maternal uncle, Rear-Admiral Sir Alexander Cornelius. . . ." An introspective preoccupied film sheathed his Reverence's eye at the mention of this august relative, and his voice slurred inaudibly over the rest of the name, dropping, once it had got on to it, like a boy going little-man down a slide, as though that were a mere side issue and of no consequence to anybody. "Ha! . . dear old fellow." He cast the shadow of the mighty name behind him and emerged from under its dark, obliterative portals into the genial sunlight of conversation again. "He

knew something about fishes and the way to cook 'em. Maintained his stomach in fine working condition for something like ninety years, and ate herring olives up to within two days of his final embarkation. That's it; help yourself, and dip well into the vinegar dressing. Don't bother about the bones; there aren't any. Beautiful! beautiful! You'll find these one of the grandest *hors d'œuvres* you ever tasted; they'll put an edge on your appetite like a hollow ground razor. Mark my words. The Admiral used to say there was only one excuse for gentlefolk to eat herrings—and this was it. Ha! he was a knowing old dog. (Did you take care to express the oil well out of 'em, Pam, dear child? That's right. Herrings have a habit of becoming disagreeably oleaginous at this season of the year and onwards, with a tendency to clog the hepatic ducts and involve the hypochondria unless they're carefully treated.) Sprinkle a little red pepper by the side of 'em, my son, as I'm going to do myself, and thank me for telling you. That'll help the flavour out of 'em like magic—if only you don't scorch your palate to start with. Ha! the gentle art of feeding."

And so they entered upon it, with little thin, crustless sandwiches of brown bread and butter (Pam's making) to accompany the olives, and the Spawer went twice without shame, and said he endorsed all that Father Mostyn and the Rear-

knows nothing of albumen and gelatine and osmazone and the nutritive juices. Might as well talk to Ullbrig about the Hithpæl of Lamad or the characteristics of the Heemanti letters. Lean, fat, bone, gristle, and suet—that's what Ullbrig knows and goes by. Ask Deacon Jackson if there's any osmazone in his meat and see what he says. Depend upon it, he'll be indignant at the suggestion. He'll tell you no, he's never sold anything but fresh meat all his life, and, please God, he's not going to begin; with a text from Nehemiah. As for gastronomy. . . ." Father Mostyn crumpled up his lips like a withered rosebud, and wagged his head at the word with the whites of his eyes to the ceiling. "If you were to ask him whether he'd ever made a study of it he'd take you for a necromancer, as sure as eggs, and tell you it's forbidden in the Book. Ha! we are a rudimentary people."

In such wise they embarked upon the beef stage, and laid siege to Pam's succulent salad, with its tender, juicy greens and its mellifluous cream sauce; and drew upon the blood-red beet and the garnished tongue; and had to be replenished with fresh rolls from the d'oylied Sheffield plate basket; and despatched their plates as before (when they had made quite sure they were done with them); and Father Mostyn threw himself to either side of the table again in survey (though with less precipitancy this time) and discovered there was a pie on the table, and said: "Ha! . . a pie? . . . What's under the crust, dear child? . . . Beef steak, is it?" and Pam looked at him in surprise for a space, and said: "Don't you know? . . . It's chicken." And Father Mostyn said: "Chicken? Beautiful! beautiful! Another of our glorious prides, Wynne. Chicken-pie, *à la* Mrs. Dixon and one better. Raise the crust, dear child, in seemly triangles, and let's see what sort of a conscience it's got."

Then Pam plied the knife and fork upon it as directed, with her little oaten wrists uplifted, and removed a beautiful slice of crust—all a-tremble with jelly on its under side, and embedded with white and gold of egg, and rich, granulated red gravy (almost like the coral of lobster), and little tongues of crimson ham, and grey-brown purple buttons of mushroom . . . a sight to make the defunct gods in Olympia lick their classic chops—and the conscience was more than equal to the crust. So the pie passed in turn, nobly supported by the savoury eggs, and similarly succeeded all the other items of the feed—(a glorious procession)—the stewed plums, the custard, the trifle pudding, the port-wine jellies, the whipped

creams, and the cheese, with the wherewithal to wash them down and cleanse the palate for its discriminating duties—St. Julia winking rosily in the tinted claret glasses by the sides of Father Mostyn and the Spawer; simple lemonade in a tumbler for Pam to put her lips to.

And all the while they talked. At least, the Spawer and Father Mostyn did. Pam said less with her lips, but her eyes were always present in the heart of the conversation—so frankly and sweetly and freely communicative, and with such beautiful brows of sympathetic understanding playing above them that one never felt any need of the spoken word. Indeed, one didn't even notice it wasn't there. It quite seemed as though she were talking as much as the rest until you tried to sift the conversation subsequently and apportion the things that had been said to the sayers of them, when you saw how small Pam's portion really was. And yet, like the little leaven, it leavened the whole mass. That was because she possessed the unconscious subtle faculty of extending her words through manner; of perfuming them, as it were, with her own sweet, ineffable identity, so that what had been a mere brief-spoken monosyllable, unmemorable of itself, became through her a complete sentence in physical expression, memorable for some beautiful phrase of neck or lips, or brows or lips or chin, or all of them together, perhaps, in one melodious gesture.

—After all this they passed in procession over the echoing flagstones into the far room, where was the little sprightly old-fashioned spinster of a Knoll piano, exhaling still a faint pungency of ammonia from its recent ablutions, with new candles in its sconces and an open copy of Rossini's Stabat Mater laid suggestively on its desk, and all its yellow ivories exposed in a four-octave smile of seduction.

And here Pam brought those familiar etceteras of hospitality with which the Spawer had already made acquaintance; and filled the pipe as unconcernedly and as skilfully as though she were a seasoned smoker, drawing the loose, shaggy brown yarn of bird's eye out of the glazed jar, and kneading it equably into the bowl with a lithe, compressive forefinger; and sliced the three rounds of lemon for his Reverence's glass, and added the two lumps of sugar—carefully picked by hand and weighed—and grated the nutmeg over them (grating the downward way only), and poured in the requisite two-thirds of boiling water, making a musical spoon-clink the while; and measured out the whisky into the broken-stemmed wine-glass, and tippled it upside down over the steaming tumbler, and filled the eloquent compound from the kettle just to every detail as his Reverence's self had done it — except the drinking.

And they made music—glorious music—on the little short-compassed upright, half a tone below diapason normal, with defective dampers and garrulous keys, and a confused Æolian jangle in the depths of it, even when you coughed, as of a stone cast down some deep well. They had the concerto, of course—what was written of it—that Pam, nursing intent clasped hands in her lap, with her head erect and her red lips folded and her eyes aglow, adjudged more beautiful the more she heard it. Oh, what a glorious thing it was to be a composer, and have one's head filled with beautiful music in place of other people's ordinary humdrum ideas! And Father Mostyn passed a rhapsodical hand over his shining scalp and said: "Ha! . . makes one long for a few hairs to stand on end in tribute to it. Such music as that seems somehow to be wasted on a bald head."

And they had the A flat prelude again, that sealed Pam's eyes with the great round tears of remembrance, and sent them seeking instinctively for the little green mound on the slope by the church tower, though they were too blind to read even the big black capitals of a child's primer. And the Black Study they had; and some of Bach's Englische Suiten; and

bits of Beethoven, the Waldstein; and the 111; and part of the "Emperor"; and snatches of Brahms—all just as they came into the Spawer's head, with little illuminative discourses to accompany them—a sort of running verbal analytic programme, as it were. And Father Mostyn gave them reminiscences of Mario and Grisi and Braham and the great Lablache, and sang "I am no better than my Fathers," from Elijah.

Not a bit better, really—if indeed as good.

And the Spawer furnished humorous illustrations of all the great players. De Pachmann, with the high, uplifted finger and exquisite smile; and the statuesque Paderewski, sitting stonily at the piano; and the oblivious Rubinstein; and the imperious Liszt; and the pedagogic Von Bülow; all of them as funny as could be, with real musicianly insight at the back of them; most felicitous examples of instructive comparative criticism.

And Pam had her first lesson this night, and was quite ready to begin the second when that was over; and there seemed not more happiness in Heaven.



CHAPTER XXVII

It was midnight when Pam breathed guarded good-bye over her shoulder to Father Mostyn and the Spawer in the roadway, and let herself noiselessly out of their sight through the post-house door.

Up above, in the bedroom that lay over the passage, a rhythmic sonorous sound, as of a trades-union carpenter sawing somebody else's wood by time in a leisurely snr-r-r-snor-r-r, gave token that the postmaster, at least, was enjoying the abundant fruits of blessed repose with his mouth open, having, two good hours agone, had his customary bout with the Book (Lev. vi. and vii.), wrestling every inch of the way, text by text and letter by letter, and gone solemnified upstairs to bed in his grey stocking-feet after a drawn game. In darkness Pam tiptoed to the little clean kitchen, and cautiously lighting the candle that her own hands had left ready for her on the corner of the dresser, held it gently about her on all sides in final inspection, for the observance of any little neglected duties that might be the better for doing before she took her way to bed. To one side of the fireplace there was the little clothes-horse standing—more, by right, a pony—gaily caparisoned with clocked hose and plain; long stockings and short; grey woollens; unstarched collars, and sundry inspiriting pink and white frilled trappings, that should have given mettle to the sorriest nag alive. Through the internal brightness of remembered music Pam's practical mind went out instinctively to the stockings. She set down her candle, and ran them one by one like gloves over her left hand as far as the foot, working her fingers within the hiddenmost recesses of toe and heel for any signs of the wanting stitch. Out of some dozen pairs it wanted in three that forthwith did not return to the little clothes-pony, but went over her left arm in token of unsoundness. With these dangling at her skirt she made quick, noiseless tracks over the kitchen floor to acquire the necessary paraphernalia of repair—for nobody ever recognised the superiority of time present over time past or future better than Pam, or, recognising it, put the recognition to more practical

account—and slipping a purposeful finger through the ringed handle of the candlestick, prepared to fetch worsted from the kitchen parlour.

She took the knob in her hand and entered naturally enough, opening the door gently first of all, against any grease-sputtering displacement of air, and keeping watch on the candle's behaviour as she brought it round from the shelter of her bosom and passed it in front of her across the threshold. Quite two steps forward she had taken, with her eyes on the little yellow flame, before something strange about the feel of the room plucked peremptorily at her attention as though with live fingers, and brought her up on her heel, gazing in front of her, to an involuntary quick-drawn breath of surprise. On the wool mat, in the centre of the square table where they gathered at meals, stood the lamp, still burning dimly, but with a great thirsty red tongue thrust through its contorted blue lips of flame. Pam's first impression, as she looked forward and saw the big round globe winking and blinking at her, was that it had been left alight, either through inadvertence, by the last sitter (and who could that be?), or intentionally, with a view to her return; but almost before the thought had had time to shape itself she discerned on a sudden, in the obscurity beyond the lamp, the blur as of a second globe, where a human head lay bowed in the supportive hollow of two pallid hands.

Head and hands of the schoolmaster, beyond a doubt. How

the attitude dissolved. The long spectral fingers slid downwards (so quickly that he might have been merely drawing them across his cheeks when Pam entered) and his body rose from the chair to a standing posture. He gave no look at Pam, though his averted head showed recognition of her presence.

For a second or so there was silence in the room, Pam gazing over her candle at the drawn white face—whiter and more drawn than usual, it seemed to her—with the guilty thought beating within her that once again she had brought herself before this man unwelcomely. Then, seeing that she was the intruder, and that he, risen to full height from the chair, showed no signs of addressing her, or even of actively ignoring her, but stood passive, as though she had summoned his attention and he was simply giving it, without prejudice to any explanation she might wish to make—begged his pardon (for Heaven knows what) in a voice of infinite apology and contrition.

"... I beg your pardon ..." she said. "I'm sorry ... I didn't think ... you'd be here so late."

Her eyes, that had been gloriously rounded to the first wonder of discovery, sank suddenly like quenched suns beneath the leaden sea of her contrition. Even the red lustre of her lips sank too, and her nostrils, as she looked at him, drew into each other with a little impalpable shrinking movement, like twin troubled sisters, that wind consolatory arms and seek strength in the loving unity of their feebleness. Surely no man's sight could have been gratified with more perfect flowers of a contrite heart than these—if only he had been looking at her.

"I hope I haven't disturbed you ..." she said, in a flat, sad voice. He bit his lip over a strained short "No," and the soul of her sighed.

"I didn't mean to. I only came in for some worsted ... Emma used it last. A grey ball with three needles in it, the colour of uncle's stockings. May I look for it? ... It's by the Bible, I think."

Without a word he turned on his heel to the sideboard where the big everyday reading Bible lay, and commenced a silent search. Something about the desolate droop of his thin, threadbare shoulders and the weary aimlessness of his seeking, sent (as his rear prospect always seemed to send) a thrill of spontaneous pity through Pam's heart. Why she pitied him, or exactly what there was about the shiny obverse of him to

stimulate the emotion, for the life of her could she have told. It was as though there were two schoolmasters occupying that one frail tenement of a body; the first like the drawing-room lodger that lived all to the front, awing Pam by the dominating aloofness of the big bow windows and stiff curtains; the second, the poor, lonely, inconsiderable kitchen boarder, that shambled under bowed shoulders about the back regions, uncared for and unnoticed. Before the first, Pam's heart sought timidly for pity; behind the second, it sought tumultuously to give it. Ah! if only the two worn buttons at the back of him had been eyes, and she could have gazed all her yearnings—yearnings to beg and yearnings to bestow—through them into the depths of his soul.

But that was impossible. The utmost she could do was to look upon them compassionately, and observing on a sudden that he was some considerable time with his coat-tails turned towards her, and seemed, by the laborious stooping of his shoulders, quagmired in his search, she suggested—with such gentleness of breathing as would not have rocked the flame of her candle—that perhaps . . . if he would let her . . . she might be able. . . .

Immediately he spun round from the side cupboard as though she had struck him, with the needles flashing in his hand.

"Is this your worsted?" he said.

For answer he stooped over the table on both hands and blew out the convulsed flame with two short breaths. A thin, acrid column of smoke from the red wick commenced to wend its perpetual way upward, like a soul in tedious migration.

"I am going to bed," he said.

Even divided between her concern at the smouldering horror, in placid enactment under the lamp globe, and the constraint she never failed to feel before the presence of this man, Pam's quick ear caught the sudden collapse of utter weariness in his voice as he said it. Something in the sound of it smote her soul to pity, as though she had had a momentary sight of his shoulders.

"You were not . . . sitting up . . . for me?" she asked—begged would be a better word—turning round appealingly at the inquiry with the wide-open eyes of half-incredulous revelation.

Either the candle, nodding its drowsy, yellow, night-cap flame at the disturbance of her turn, cast queer, contortive shadows over his face; or her eyes, played upon in the dim light by a hundred impostor fancies, bore false witness; or in sheer hard matter of fact, she had seen him swallow her words with the revulsive shudder for an unpalatable draught.

"Why should I sit up . . . for you?" he asked her; and his two hands went up to his collar.

"I don't know . . . why you should," she said, plucking her reply to pieces, petal by petal, in soft embarrassment, as though it had been a flower. All the working of his lips, it seemed to her, could not conceal the sardonic amusement her answer stirred in him. Red shame rushed up the slim column of the girl's neck and plunged for hiding in the roots of her hair. ". . . And of course . . . you didn't," she hastened to add.

"Of course."

Whether he repeated her words in mere unconcerned assent, or pressed upon them with the hard knuckle of sarcasm, or was using them interrogatively, Pam could not make sure, nor dared she ask, though she delayed awhile with her eyes fixed for solution upon his face.

"I'm glad you didn't," she said gently, and in silence led the way into the little clean kitchen. "You will want a fresh candle," she said there, very simply, putting her own down once more on the dresser, and reaching the empty holder, that by household consent was allowed to pertain to his exclusive use. "Aunt cleaned all the candlesticks this

morning . . . but it's my fault I didn't see to them before I went out to-night. May I pass you, please?"

Out of a drawer in the dresser she produced a piece of newspaper; tore off a strip; narrowed its width by folding; bound it neatly round the base of the candle; pressed the candle securely into its socket; lighted it from her own, and handed it—after its flame was sufficiently established—to the waiting man.

He took it awkwardly and tardily enough, rocking so long in silence on his feet before acceptance, with head thrown forward and chin bearing heavily over his collar, that for some moments Pam had doubts whether he was not fast asleep and about to fall prone across the outstretched candle and her. But roused at length, as it would seem, by her prolonged gaze of inquiry, he lifted his head and extended an uncertain hand—a hand so uncertain, indeed, that at the first attempt it went wide of the candlestick altogether. At the second, more through Pam's management than his, thumb and finger closed upon it and he turned to go. The look of his dazed eyes and the dry, white lips that rubbed impotently sideways upon each other to shape a soundless "Thank you," sent a great surging tide of solicitous alarm through the length and breadth of Pam's bosom. This, surely, was no mere physical fatigue; no mere aloofness of disfavour, but something altogether

CHAPTER XXVIII

His foot was already on the first step when she urged her bated voice of inquiry after him. He stayed for a moment so, as though he lacked strength to ascend or purpose to speak, and then turned upon her very slowly.

"You ask that," he said, compressing his words through bloodless lips, hard and set, as though they had been cast in plaster of Paris. "Don't you know? Can't you see?"

The fixed, meaningful way he looked at her, as though his face were a written answer, and she could read it if she would, and the strange, underlying emphasis of his question, took Pam altogether by surprise. Didn't she know? Couldn't she see? All the dread sicknesses under the sun seemed to swathe him and envelope him in their hideous mantles as she gazed . . . a fearful kaleidoscopic counterpane of ailments. Which of all these had her blindness overlooked?

Didn't she know? Couldn't she see?

"See what?" she begged, in the whispered hush of a voice that besought an answer it scarcely dared to hear. For, framed in the narrow dark inlet of the staircase, with the candle casting corpse-hollows over his eyes, and sinking his cheeks under shadow, and sharpening his nose, and hardening his nostrils—to the girl's disturbed imagination he seemed dead and coffined already. And she had let him die in the sight of her—unregarded, untended, unalleviated. "Oh, tell me, please!" she supplicated, wringing her fingers with all the penitence for a fault committed and beyond repair, "what I ought to see. Tell me what I can do for you. Oh, I am so sorry! Is there anything you want? Is there anything I can get you?"

"You know what I want," he said, in a cavernous, sepulchred voice.

Lazarus, wakened from the dead, might have spoken his first words in just such a voice.

"*I* know what you want?" repeated Pam, falling back a little dismayed before the directness of his charge, and the blank inability of her mind to meet it.

"[illegible] You," he said.

"Me?" said Pam again, more vaguely still, taking the word from him, and trying it in turn, like a key, upon all those strings that had gone before, to see which of their several senses it might fit and open. Then, all of a sudden she saw the door it opened, and the threshold it led over, and let the [illegible] as it were, from her hands, and covered her face [illegible] with her two small fingers. "Oh, no, no, no!" she [illegible] "not that. You don't mean that."

She opened a place in her fingers to look at him through, [illegible] the silence that followed, like a fawn staring startled from [illegible] the light stalks of a thicket, and let both hands slip [illegible] ward to her skirts with the limp fall of bewilderment. [illegible] think this was the secret of his disfavour; this the reason [illegible] all his anger, and all her self-interrogations. That he [illegible] her.

He had drawn his candle on the dresser beside her own, and [illegible] the finger of his left hand looseningly round the inner rim [illegible] his collar, as though it had suddenly grown tight about [illegible]

"Why not that?" he said, in a voice so low and natureless and hoarse that it might have issued from a man of straw, for all the note it gave.

[redacted]

Pam shook a head of pitying negation.

"It wasn't that I didn't try," she told him, ". . . for I tried my best. But I couldn't. I never thought . . . you cared one little bit about me. If I'd thought you cared for me . . . there are lots of unkind things I'd never have done that I did do, without thinking. I wouldn't have followed you into the room when you were alone, and looked at you, and tried to make you look at me, and spoken to you. Never. You'll believe I wouldn't when I say so, won't you? All the time I was only trying to make friends with you—that I was already, though I didn't know it. And all the time you thought . . . that I saw what was the matter with you, and knew why you wouldn't look at me, and what you meant when you turned your back. But I didn't. Indeed I didn't. Oh, how spiteful and cruel you must have thought me," she said, with the beautiful wetness of tears about her lashes. "And I didn't mean it for cruelty a bit. I meant it for kindness. It's all been a mistake from the first."

"Is it a mistake . . . now?" he asked.

"A mistake now?" said Pam, and looked at him for a moment; and then drew a breath, and looked at him again; and drew another breath, and still looked at him; while her lower lip broke loose and fluttered a little, like a hovering butterfly, and stopped, and fluttered a second time, and her lashes fell by an almost imperceptible shade—less a falling of the lashes, indeed, than a falling of something not definable—a thin, gauzy, darkening veil of trouble, it seemed to be, over the very look itself. "I hope not," she said; but her voice and her eyes and her lips belied the hope she spoke of. "We understand each other now . . . don't we?"

"What do we understand?" he asked huskily.

"I thought you knew," Pam said, setting her gaze on him, in trepid wonderment to think he should comprehend so badly, or so soon forgot. "I've just . . . been telling you."

"I know nothing," he said, and then in a sudden husky outburst of avowal: "There is only one thing I want to know. I've told you what it is. Have you nothing to say in return?"

The unavailing exertion of trying to raise his lead-heavy voice clear of a low whisper made him stop to cough—the hard, dry cough that weeks of patient nursing and nights of anxious solicitude had taught Pam to know so well. Each time the paroxysm caught him, the raised elbow shuddered to his side, with the left knee drawn spasmodically off the

ground to meet it, and the cough struck painfully through the softness of lung to his chest-bone with the ring of a shovel on some submerged stone in the soil.

"Nothing . . . that I should like to say," Pam answered unsteadily. "Nothing that you would wish to hear me say. I thought . . : I'd said everything. Oh, please . . . don't ask me to say any more. It might only make things worse."

He swallowed time upon time in slow succession.

"And this is the end of all my waiting?"

"If you'll let it, please, it is," Pam begged him, very pleadingly for herself; very sorrowfully for him.

"I can't let it," he blurted after a while, with such pent-up, passionate compression of breath that it seemed—at the moment of its expulsion—to blow all the bristles of his moustache outward "You don't know what you're asking of me. I can't give you up."

"But I'm not yours to give," Pam protested, with an awed voice, at this unexpected assumption of possession.

"Whose are you?" he cried.

"Nobody's, of course," Pam said, in meek submission, "except my own."

"You could be mine . . . if you would," he told her, grappling with his throat again. "Just for the saying of a

modesty, shrinking before the acceptance of such an obligation. "It wasn't I that saved you. It was you yourself that got strong and better. I only sat by you and did what little I could; but it was nothing at all . . . really."

"Nothing at all," he said, and clenched his fist in assurance. "It was everything. Why did I get stronger and better—but for you? Because you were by me, and because I wanted you . . . and couldn't bear to leave you. Look," he said, standing back from her suddenly, as though to give her full view of his statement, "do you know there were times . . . times when I could have turned my face to the wall and died for the mere wishing?"

"But you would never have done that," Pam whispered, in hushed alarm.

"Why shouldn't I have done it?" he asked her, ". . . when death was so easy and living so hard? You alone stopped me from doing it. The thought of you and the sight of you, and the hope of you. Often and often I was looking at you through my eyelashes . . . when you thought I was asleep."

"Sometimes I saw you," said Pam.

". . . And making up my mind whether to die . . . or risk living . . . for your sake. But I never could die . . . because of you. And once, when you had been a long while gone . . . I said to myself: 'How easy to slip off now . . . before she comes back' . . . and just as I was wondering whether there would be time . . . you came in, and stooped over me and kissed me. How could I die after that? Once I made up my mind to kiss you back . . . but my lips hadn't strength. You saw them move, and asked me if I wanted a drink, and I said 'Yes'; but I didn't. And you cried over me too."

"I was sorry for you," said Pam. "I wanted you to get better."

"Aren't you sorry for me now?" he asked. ". . . Now that my mind is ill . . . as my body was then?"

The terrible earnestness of his love troubled her. Love before she had witnessed in plenty, but never love like this. It was as though she stood with clasped hands before some burning homestead that her own unintending fingers had fired, and saw the fierce wind fan the flames, and heard the cry for succour from within . . . and could do nothing. Do nothing; do nothing. The hopelessness of blowing out such a conflagration with her own feeble, unavailing breath filled her head to the exclusion of all argument. The more she blew, the bigger

rose the blaze. Oh, it was horrible! For a while they looked at each other and said nothing, for each feared speaking; he, lest he might divert Pam's answer; Pam, because she had no answer to divert.

"Well?" he said at length, plucking in tremulous anxiety at the skirts of speech, for the silence of a sudden frightened him. To his agitated vision the growing anguish in the girl's eyes looked like a dumb spectre of somebody dead (and that somebody himself) that rose and wept, and wrung its sorrowing spirit fingers over his defunction. "Have you nothing to say to me?"

Pam only shook her head. What had she to say, and how could she say it when her own great heart was hammering away like a stone-mason in the place where her voice should have been.

"Not even a word?" he said, with a broken sob. "Won't you say . . . you'll try and care for me . . . if I can make you? Is it too much to ask that?"

Pam put her hands to her face.

"Oh . . . I don't know. What am I to say? What am I to do?"

". . . Do nothing," he said bitterly.

"But I want to do something," Pam protested desperately —though her own shrinking conscience told her how little.

dreaming it. Last night—half an hour ago even—I never thought you wanted to speak to me or have anything to do with me at all, and now—you're asking me to try and love you). And even if I grow to care for you in that way (and I don't know. Oh, you mustn't think I'm promising) I shouldn't want . . . I mean, it would have to be . . . oh, for a long time. Years, perhaps. Longer than ever you cared to wait. I told . . . somebody once, when they asked me what you've been asking me, that I never meant to get married. And if I did . . . it would be like acting a story to them—as they said I was doing at the time. And I've said 'No' to such lots of others too . . . and now to say 'Yes' to anybody (and I'm only saying half 'Yes'—only a quarter 'Yes'—to you) seems, somehow, like breaking faith. It seems mean . . . and unfair. And anyway it couldn't . . . couldn't possibly be yet. Couldn't be for ever such a long time. Perhaps you'd never want to wait so long as that."

"Wait?" He thrust out his hand desperately to shut this dangerous back-door out of her concession. "With you at the end of my waiting . . . I would wait till the Judgment Day."

The dreary, dogged patience of the man's passion chilled Pam. It rose up high in her mind like an awesome black monument of Patience, and cast its great shadow over the brightness of her life—on and on and on interminably, out of sight to the dull sun-setting of her days. If she could have recalled her words then. If she could have had the strength, the moral strength to throw him aside from her then and there—at never mind what momentary cost to their two feelings. All her soul, she knew, was striving impotently to cast off the encumbrance of him—but the strength was lacking. Strength to be cruel; strength to be kind. Because she could not bring herself to deal the one smart blow that the moment required with her own hand . . . she was throwing herself contemptibly upon the protection of the Future; making herself the Future's ward, and trusting, in some blind, unreasoning fashion, that her guardian would be responsible for her when the time came, and do for her what she had lacked the daring to do for herself, and free her without consequence (if so needed), and deal happiness all round with that lavish hand for which the Future is, and has been, and ever will be, so extolled.

Wild, fatal phantasy of Pam's—that she shared in common with every man, woman and temporising child of this self

deluded, procrastinating world. For the Future is that dread witch that haunts the pages of our infant fairy-books, appearing first under the guise of a sweet and amiable old lady; lures little men and women and children under her roof with bait of sugar-plums and sweetmeats; turns suddenly, while they're eating 'em, into the red-eyed, horrid old hag of to-day; makes slaves and bond of her hapless guests; starves them, beats them, kicks them, pinches them, black and blues them to do her behests, and finally (not before time) pushes them into a red-hot oven (where they've gone at her bidding to look after a cherry-pie that's not there) head first, and stews the little remaining goodness out of them for her own consumption.

But alas! all Pam's knowledge of fairy-lore (which was very small) had done her no good in applied wisdom. The compact was drawn and signed and sealed. What consequence that Pam imposed a hundred feverish reservations and supplications, and qualifications and amendments, and loopholes and contingencies upon her little old lady in the signing—and seemed to be granted them every one? Into this little old lady's house she signed herself for all that, and henceforth all her deeds and doings, and goings and comings, and takings and fetchings, and eatings and drinkings, and sleepings and wakings . . . were no longer her sweet own, as heretofore, but under the authority and subject to the control of the little

CHAPTER XXIX

GREEN July, gliding smoothly on the noiseless axles of its diurnal wheels, gives way at last to golden August, and beneath the assiduous burning of the sun the cornfields begin to brown like the crust of a pasty under the brasing iron. It is the mystic eve of harvest, that consummation of the farmer's year, and all the countryside is palpitating with it. Everywhere the talk is of cutting, and men, on meeting, cast anxious eyes from each other's faces to the sky and ask:

"Will it 'owd (hold), think ye?"

Out of the cobwebby, chaff-strewn depths of waggon-sheds and other such places of storage, dusty red and blue painted reapers are drawn forth into the sunlight—humble, antiquated tip-reapers, no bigger than a lawn-mower; intermediate sail-reapers, that "put off," but stop short of tying; the lordly American self-binder—of which there is only one in the whole district—that cuts and gathers and ties with its Manilla hemp twine, and throws off sheaf after sheaf as though the whole thing were too easy for contempt—but all of them, great and small, exalted at this hour out of their year's obscurity to the chief object of the farmer's solicitude and attention. Bolts are tightened, gearings adjusted, blades sharpened, precious bearings anointed with consecrated oil out of the battered tin ampulla. All the household turns out to witness this sacred majesty of the harvest field as though it had never set eyes on such a monarch before, what time hands are busy preparing the royal person for its duties.

"Waay! Wooa! Stop a bit, Jan Willie. . . . 'Ev ye gotten 'er i' gear, man? Ay, that y'ave. Pull 'er up a bit. Noo then; gie 'er a sup more oil. Are ye ready? Noo she'll gan."

And the enthusiasm, waking, almost reaches the height of a cheer when this machine is at last proclaimed in thorough-going order and fit for the field. It seems almost too good for credence. Under the strong influence of emotion, Jan Willie comes to be regarded with the veneration for a great mechanical inventor, to whom the glory of the corn-reaper is

due, as he wipes his parafiny fingers and says, in tones of not unpardonable pride :

" Ay, ah'll a-wander she'll cut noo, mester."

At every farmstead, exalted with such a possession, the same comedy is being enacted. Dixon, ever among the early sowers and the forward reapers, causes the little old-fashioned industrious tip-cutter to be unearthed—as from some prehistoric mound—and while Arny lubricates all its joints under a pleasant squirting, gazes on it with the beaming fond eye of a parent.

" Ay, she's a tidy tit," he tells the Spawer, ". . . for all she's nobbut a little un. She's cutten many a hunder acre i' 'er time, an' she'll do a goodish few yet, if we'm all well an' spared, before she's done. Ah s'll not be gettin' a self-binder this year, ah think. (Gie 'er a sup at yon side, Arny.) . . Noo, what sort o' cuttin' do they do i' France? By 'and, ah's think. They weean't 'ave gotten such things as them i' their parts yet?"

And word is sent to the great Jarge Yenery of Sproutgreen, a man profoundly wise with the reaped experience of fifty years' harvesting (whose only failing, perhaps, is a certain tendency to presume on his wisdom), and Jarge Yenery appears to the hour, having walked under the same roasted earthern straw hat as ever, in the crevices of which linger husks

square windows of leaded glass, that give one side of it the look of a greenhouse; filled with the fine aromatic perfume of fresh resinous pine and new-sawn wood, and white curled shavings and turpentine, and putty and paint; its interior piled up into vague shadow masses of saws and jack-planes and spokeshaves, and dowelling-bits and brace-bits and deal planks, and fresh turned wheel spokes and felloes and cart axles. Displayed in various positions about the workshop, catching the strong light here and the shadow there, are motto cards, much bethumbed, and bearing evidences of having been trodden on more than once with hobnailed boots of no light persuasion, to such effect as: "Wine is a Mocker"; "Avoid Strong Drink"; "Friend, Swear not." And while you are imbibing the sentiment of the latter, you will suddenly hear Shep Stevens apostrophising his son's eyes for nothing that you can discover—except that the father has trodden on him—or ask some friendly occupant of the workshop, "What the divvle e's giein' 'im a brace-bit for when 'e sees 'e wants chisel?" for everybody here assembled is expected to lend a hand in his neighbours' several affairs, and is ordered about by this industrious despot in the round cap with side buttons as though he pertained to him body and soul.

"Noo then, Artie. What's ti starin' at, man? Tek 'old o' yon end, quick—unless ye want to see us drop 'er."

"Jarge. Nay, dom it, man .... En't ye no fingers? Can ye creep under 'er, div ye think?—gen we 'old 'er 'igh enough—an' screw yon bolt up?"

Further down the road, and round its corner, the brewer's stomach—bulging out imposingly in these days from between the stone pillars of the brew-yard entrance—takes on, by some unconscious assimilative power, the noble rotundity of his own beer barrels that he sees hourly being consigned in spring cart and heavy waggon to all quarters of the compass, to fortify the flagging spirits of the labourers in the harvest field. On every hand are signs and tokens for the great gathering in. From man to man, and from farm to farm, the harvest fever spreads till the very air seems infected with it, and the accumulated desire of all these restless, chafing mortals, scrutinising the sky with terrible eyes, devours all other thoughts like a delirium. Even mortals professing no part in the risks or chances of this mighty mowing are consumed with impatience to invade the territory now held by this solid standing army, to see the brown-headed phalanx fall

to the blade, be bound captive, and led away to the citadels of security.

And while this vast metamorphosis of colour is creeping over the land, and the countryside seems beating like a breast towards the consummation of its great purpose, Pam and the piano and the Spawer and Father Mostyn grow daily into a bond of deeper sympathy, and the wondrous ripening process, so visible in externals, is going on no less surely within their own hearts. On the little cracked Vicarage piano Pam practises assiduously, and such is her zeal for the labour, and such her sense of loyal gratitude to the setter of it and her desire to fulfil his instructions that, by sheer force of love alone, she keeps pace with what he teaches and wins his admiring praise for her progress. Sometimes they gather at Father Mostyn's, cutting into chicken-pies one night and finishing them off another. Sometimes Father Mostyn and Pam walk up to Cliff Wrangham for the benefit of the better piano, and compare the Archdeaconess's cookery—without comment, and very kindly—and are set back by the Spawer, filled with music and affection.

A state of things which greatly indignates the orphan Mary Anne, who cries aloud to herself:

"Is there nawbody good enough for 'im at Cliff Wrangham bud 'e mun gan 'is ways an' fetch 'em fro' Oolbrig?"

sea-coast words, and could make herself understood intelligibly—and certainly prettily—to any Frenchman on any cliff you like to name. And they talk quite sincerely about the sea and the blueness of it; and bend down their heads for the better appreciation of this great round bubble of colour; and draw each other's attention to clouds, to bees, to butterflies, and nameless insects fluttering by. At other times, the Spawer talks to her of his student life abroad and of his present-day ambitions; the sort of glory he covets and the sort of glory by which he sets no store. And the talk is of composers and schools of composers; and players and schools of players—thick as shoals of herrings—till Pam, who never forgets a precious word of what this deified mortal tells her, but can reproduce its exact use and inflection for her own hearing at any future time, is full to the red lips with critical discernments and differentiations, and could astonish any wandering, way-logged musician who might, for the sake of illustration, be presumed to find himself in the district, and open subject of his own business with this sweet girl stranger under her Government bag.

Sometimes, towards the end of an evening at Father Mostyn's, the Doctor drops in upon them casually, introducing himself with the invariable "Don't let me distairrb ye"—though it is known he comes for whist. Music appeals to him about as meaningfully as a German band to a stray dog; and being a Scotchman, he says so in the fewest words wherein this hard truth can be contained, nor ceases to manifest a lurking distrust of the piano until they are safely squared round the card-table, and the cards are being cut. In his own Scotch way he is as fond of Pam as can be, and on the strength of this tacit affection asks her bluntly to do whatever he may happen to be in need of at the time.

"Ye'll hae to gie me another match, Pam," he says unconcernedly, as he deals, without looking at her. "A'm no alicht yet."

And when she offers it to him, already lighted, he merely holds his pipe-bowl towards her from his mouth, as a matter of course, scooping up his cards and drawing vigorously, while Pam applies the flame, till combustion is effected, when he draws his mouth away.

"Clubs are trumps," says he.

Pam doesn't mind his disregard of her in the least, for you see he doesn't mean anything by it, being a Scotchman; but she would enjoy these games better if the exigencies of play

did not always pit her against the Spawer, inasmuch as she and he, being the two weak members of the quartette, can never be partnered against such past masters as his Reverence and the Doctor. Eventually, since it proves itself the most equable division of the table, she comes to be the accepted partner of the latter, who does not hesitate to acquaint her, with cutting directitude, of any discrepancy in her play.

"What the deil made ye lead trumps, Pam?" he demanded of her, in blank surprise, on one occasion. "Did ye no see me look at ye last time Father Mostyn led them?"

He is a typical hardy Scotsman, all sinew and gristle, and raw about the neck, and thinks little—if indeed at all—concerning dress. For the most part, you will see him bicycling about the roads in meagre knickerbockers that were trousers when he first came to Ullbrig, blue stockings, and heavy-soled boots, with the tags sticking off them like spurs. In other respects, he is a reader of profane literature and avowed sceptic. Between him and his reverence the Vicar is a standing feud of opinion, which finds vent in many an argumentative battle royal. At the end of one of these tremendous conflicts, that would almost be hand-to-hand at times but for the pacific whisky-bottle between them, the Doctor rises to his feet, buttons his coat-collar as a preliminary to departure, and cries vehemently:

as Reenan and Strauss, and Bauerr and Darrwin, and Thomas Huxley?"

"Estimable people, no doubt, friend Anderson," the Vicar tells him imperturbably. ". . . Estimable people."

"Ah doot ye've read a wurrd of them," the Doctor pronounces bluntly.

"So much the better for me, dear brother. So much the better for me."

"Mon," says the Doctor, exasperated by this equanimous piety that all his own exasperation cannot exasperate. ". . . Ye're a peetifu' creature, an' ah feel shame tae be drinkin' the whisky o' such as you. Ye go inta chairrch and fill a lot o' puir eegnorant people wi' mair ignorance than they had without ye, teachin' them your fairy tales about apples and sairrpints, and women bein' made oot o' man's rib (did one ever hearr the like!). Let's awa', an' mind dinna tek inta yer heid ta fall sick this week, or it'll go harrd wi' ye if ah'm called."

"Ha! We can die but once, brother Anderson," the priest tells him cheerfully. "Even all the science and medical skill in the world can't kill us more than that."

And so the moments of these four pass, and the harvest hour approaches, inwardly and outwardly, until at last . . . one day. . . .

But in the meanwhile, for all this life of external happiness that Pam shared with others, she was serving her silent apprenticeship in the house of the little old lady. Even when he was furthest from her the schoolmaster clung close to her mind. Each time she laughed, each time she looked into the Spawer's face, each time she spoke with him she saw inside her—but as plainly as though she had been looking at him in the flesh—the dark figure of the schoolmaster regarding her in mute reproof, with hands to throat and beating temples. The brightest moments of her happiness, indeed, threw this shadow most blackly across her mind, like the gnomon of a dial when the sun shines clearest. Whenever she returned now from Father Mostyn's or the Spawer's, he was always there sitting up for her. Heaven knows why, for they had little enough to say to one another. He never pressed himself upon her, but by leaving himself to her good pity she felt the claim of him tenfold—lacking the power to withhold what, perhaps, on demand, she might have summoned courage to deny. Always he was dumbly set, like those canvas collecting sheets on Lifeboat Saturdays, for the smallest coppers of her

kindness. If she had not looked into the larger kitchen before bed she knew he would never have revealed himself, but she had not the heart to ignore one as little courageous for the winning of her love as she was herself for its defence. At times the thought of what the future had in store for her troubled her so darkly that she knew not how best to shape her present moments. Therefore, in place of shaping, she merely whittled—for every cut this way, a cut that; for every chip off one side, a chip off the other; so that though the rough wood she worked on wore nearer down to her fingers it assumed no shape. Through fear of having been too cruel one day she was constantly over-kind the next; and then, what she had lacked to charge in cruelty to him she charged extortionately to herself, paid the bills in silence, and said never another word. But though she could meet these little daily expenditures, there was a great bill slowly mounting, she knew, which should of a surety one day be presented to her. And who should pay that? Who should pay that?

While the music is at Father Mostyn's and the Spawer's she feels to a certain extent in harbour against the evil day. But what shall happen when this harbour is denied her, and for fault of its protection, she must sail out into the open, unprotected sea? What will betide her then? What is

CHAPTER XXX

ONE day the Spawer wakes up suddenly to consciousness, like Barclay in the hedge bottom, and discovers, as his friend Barclay has not infrequently discovered before him, that he is occupying a strange and uncomfortable position. It was on a Tuesday when he made the final effort and awoke definitely to an actual sense of his location, but he had been blinking at it unseeingly for some while before that. The previous morning Father Mostyn had taken leave of Ullbrig for his few days' annual pike fishing with the Rev. the Hon. Algernon Smythe Trepinway in Norfolk, and this sudden break in the continuity of existence had served as an alarum to the Spawer's long slumber. He woke reluctantly, but with purpose, took his morocco red bathing drawers, his towel and his stick, and without pausing to any appreciable length at the lane gate, plunged across the two fields towards the cliff.

It was a glorious, steadfast blue day. Not a cloud as big as the puff of my lady's powder-box showed itself in any corner of the sky. No breezes, even of the softest, filtered through the hot hedges, or cooled the parched tips of the burning grass blades. Without intermission the sun poured his golden largess down upon the earth from on high, so forcefully that wherever the sunlight rested, it was as though a great hot hand were imposing its weight. Yesterday the harvesting had set in with a vengeance, and now the whole air was a-quiver with the whir of busy blades, whose tireless activity seemed the very music made for slumber, and lulled all other moving things towards somnolent repose.

The beach lay out dazzling in its unbroken smoothness, like white satin, and deserted quite. Not another footstep than his own had been, or in all probability would be, there that day to tread destructive perforating tracks over its beautiful surface of sand. Up and down, for something like a dozen clear miles of coast, or so far as his eyes could show him, he seemed, like a second Robinson Crusoe, monarch of all he surveyed. The true spirit of the solitude of the lower Yorkshire coast is here. There is no elaboration to the picture; it is

plain and lacking detail. Of foliage by the sea there is not a leaf, excepting mere divisional hedges. Fields in cultivation and out of it run to the very edge of the cliff—a sombre cliff of soft, dark earth, stained here and there to unprepossessing rusty red, with trickling chalybeate streams, and showing terrible toothmarks of the voracious sea, that feeds its way inland on this part of the coast at the rate of a yard a year. Looking over the brink of it you can discern as many as half-a-dozen paths, in various stages of subsidence, that less than that number of years ago led people along the cliff top as the path you stand on leads them now. In other places you may see huge slices of grass land, descending like great steps downwards to the shore in their progress towards ultimate devourance, while warning fissures across the existing pathway show where, perhaps this very winter, another step will be detached and added to the never-ending stairway of demolition.

In the immediate foreground is the black devastated hulk of the *Queen of Sheba*, that came ashore during the thick fog of a fatal November morning some ten years ago, and whose single iron mast—the last of three—stands still a silent monument to the disaster. Under a low leaden sky, when the sea is turned to zinc, with great vivid scratches carved on its surface by the keen-bladed lights, and the wings of sea-birds flash electrically white against the inky clouds, there is a weird

in vain. But for him to-day the sun is a little dim, the sea a little jaded. The inward content that stood interpreter between his soul and this outward worldly joyance is gone from him, and he stands somehow like a stranger in the presence of strange things. Here on the seashore, he has come to play a duet more full of emotion, and more crowded with difficulties than any he knows within the province of music, for it is a duet with his own soul.

In a sense, dimly and vaguely, he has comprehended for a day past, a couple of days past, at the most — Lord help him—a week, that this duet was inevitable. He has been, indeed, since these several days, two men. The second was better than the first, but not much. The second of them held the strings of the conscience bag (slackly, however) and rattled it ominously—though more as a warning, if the truth were told —to give the first his chance of escape. In the heart of the second (if heart it could be called) there lingered a sneaking sympathy with the delinquent first, as for a younger brother. And now, after a mutual game of hide-and-seek, when the one would not look while the other showed, and the other would not show while the other was looking, through a kind of desperate conviction that something must be done, they had sneaked their two ways down to the beach this morning, prepared (though only badly) to declare themselves to one another, and come to some understanding, though whether this understanding should be creditable or discreditable to both or to either was yet unsettled.

By what subtle, imperceptible paths has he outjourneyed the territory of that great happiness which seemed so lately his, to find himself all suddenly in this unpleasant no-man's land of the imagination? By subtle, imperceptible paths indeed. By the touch of hands; by the gazing of eyes; by the inflection of voice. Time was, in the early days it was, when he could look on Pam's fascinating sprinkling of freckles with an eye as purely interested, and as purely disinterested, as though they had been the specklings of a wild bird's egg. He had begun by making a friend of her. He had come ultimately to regard her as a sister, to whom he had acted in all good faith the strong, reliant, reliable, affectionate, unemotional elder brother —who could have kissed her, and thought no more of that kiss, nor prepared his lips for kisses to come. And now . . . what was he going to make of her next? . . . of himself? Who but a brother can act the brother? Who but a father—even though he doddle benevolently on his legs and have respectable

white hairs—can be sure of acting the father to any daughter not his own? What are the sexes but phosphorus and sandpaper for the kindling of love's emotion? Already the phosphorus had not wanted signs of impending ignition. Just a very little more rubbing of this friendly intercourse—a day or two . . . a week at most . . . and the flame would burst out for them both to see. So here let him settle it. What was he going to do?

He did not know what he was going to do. . . . There were complications.

Complications of his own allowing, remember. Why had he not let it be plainly understood—as soon as his relations with this girl grew—that he was a man with a claim upon him?

Ah! If only he had.

Why hadn't he? Had he shirked it? If he had shirked it, then he was indeed guilty.

He did not think he had shirked it . . . at least, with intention.

But the idea had come to him. Come to him more than once. Did he not on one occasion at Hesketh's corner make the resolve to tell the girl that he was going to be married?

Yes.

Then why didn't he?

He had certainly avoided anything that might be odious to the girl . . . or painful to her feelings—but he had had no ideas of involving her. God forbid!

And the other? The Absent One? What had been his feelings towards her? Had he thought his conduct such as to merit her confidence in him?

He had not thought it undeserving of her confidence. Their relations were of long standing. Before now he had kissed some mutual girl friends in her presence. She had smiled.

Supposing he had kissed them in her absence . . . and she had come subsequently to hear of it? Would she have smiled? Of course he had told her in his letters all about the post-girl—and their present relations?

He had told her the postman was a girl.

Exactly. But what sort of a girl?

Was there more than one sort of a girl? A girl, it seemed to him, was a girl all the world over. The definition was plain enough.

Had he said she was a pretty girl?

Why should he have said that?

Why should he have avoided it?

He hadn't avoided it. It was only one of the things he hadn't . . . specified. Why should he specify a "pretty girl" any more than he should have specified an "ugly one"? Besides . . . prettiness was all abstract, and relative, and indefinable. When we called a thing pretty we only meant that it excited that particular degree of emotion in our own mind. Other people might decide upon it as ugly.

Exactly. Had he, by any chance, spoken of Cliff Wrangham as a delightful corner of the world's end?

He believed he had.

And he had mentioned Father Mostyn?

Certainly. He had alluded to him.

In affectionate and laudatory terms?

He didn't know about affectionate and laudatory terms. Perhaps he had. He had spoken of him as he had found him. Father Mostyn had always been kind. In writing he had no doubt alluded to that kindness.

More than once?

Doubtless more than once. Kindness was not such a common quality that it would not bear a little repetition.

He had mentioned the Doctor.

Some of him. His stockings, he believed, and his strange happiness in speaking the truth.

How often had he met the Doctor?

Perhaps half-a-dozen times.

And the post-girl?

Let him see. . . .

Exactly. He couldn't count the number. He had mentioned with some small degree of detail a man who was but a cypher in his visit, and he had overlooked altogether the figure which was its numerator, so to speak.

He had mentioned that Miss Bates claimed to be a pupil of his?

It had seemed funny enough to mention.

But he had not mentioned the source of the anecdote?

The source of his information was surely irrelevant. Humour did not require to be based upon authority for its effect.

Perhaps not. But the association of ideas was strong. If he had found the fact that Miss Bates wished to be thought a pupil of his so funny, why had he not mentioned that the village post-girl was a pupil in fact? That was funnier still, wasn't it?

He didn't see where the fun came in. It was an act of . . . of charity.

. . . Of *what*?

. . . Of friendship. Friendship in a dual sense. Friend-

He resented that word "carrying on." It prejudiced him in his own estimation.

"Associating," then. All the time that She was associating with this man She was scribbling him perfunctory letters telling him everything but this one main fact. Telling him, for instance, that "Now she must bring this scrawl to a finish, dear, because the tide will be up shortly, and there'll be good-bye to my bathe." Did the tide come up shortly, by the way?

He was subsequently delayed.

By the letter?

By the post-girl.

Ah! And suppose She had told him: "Now I must finish, love, or this letter will miss the post"?

There was nothing untrue about that.

Except the wording. Ought it not to have run: ". . . miss the post-girl"?

The post-girl was the post in Cliff Wrangham. If she had not got his letter then it would have meant his going to Ullbrig to post it before the mail-cart left.

And when he'd given the letter into the post-girl's hands, did he walk with her all round by Shippus and carry the bag for her?

Perhaps he did.

Perhaps?

Yes. Certainly he did.

In other words, he'd been a bit of a blackguard, hadn't he?

No. He couldn't submit to that word. His intentions had not been blackguardly.

Precisely. His intentions had not been blackguardly, but his actions had. Was that it?

He couldn't admit that it was. His actions had been as clean as he could have wished them. He had scrupulously avoided any amorous familiarities with the girl. He had treated her with a respect that he could scarcely have exceeded in the case of his sister.

Perhaps so. His conduct towards the girl herself might be above reproach. Assume, for his conscience' sake, that it was so. Did this super-reverential feeling show much reverence to the Other One? In proportion as he had honoured this girl, had he not dishonoured that?

He didn't see why it need be so.

Possibly he didn't see. But was it easy to assume?

Perhaps it was.

On the face of things, that is to say?

On the face of things, perhaps it was.

Suppose he had put the case, as it stood, before a referee, chosen from the Sons of the World. Suppose he'd said, for instance: There was a fellow once, engaged to a girl. The girl went with a maiden aunt by marriage to Switzerland for the aunt's health. It was arranged that while they were there the fellow was to go into obscurity by the sea-coast and complete some great compositional work he had the vanity to think he could achieve, and that, after the girl's return, either towards the end of November or the early part of January, these two were to be married. But during this obscurity the fellow came upon an altogether unusual sample of a post-girl. She was supposed to be derived from a family of importance; had all the inherited gifts of a lady; the low, musically-balanced voice; the symmetrical, graceful figure and carriage; beautiful teeth and a smile like dawn. Suppose everything about the girl appealed to this fellow tremendously. Suppose they became . . . well, call it friends. Suppose he taught her music and French, and met her as often as possible. Suppose all his moments were occupied in thinking of her. Suppose the life he had left and the life (presumably) he was going back to were receded so far away that he could scarcely distinguish them, or his obligations to them. Suppose that

like an increasing snowball of accusation against him, but at the time they had seemed slight enough. When he had scribbled off the letters it had been with a consciousness of the shuffle, but with the inward resolve, clearly defined, to atone for it by a longer letter next day, or some other day.

And he had done so?

Unfortunately, no. Fate, there again, had seemed against him. But the intention had not been wanting—it was the flesh only that had been a little weak.

In the light of present understanding, then, if by the mere wish he could blot out not only the remembrance of this weakness but the actuality of it, he would wish the wish?

No reply.

Eh? He would wish the wish at once—wasn't that so?

Still no reply.

Perhaps he hadn't quite understood. Put it another way. Suppose, since the doings of these latter days were not entirely creditable to him, when viewed dispassionately, was he prepared to wish that he had never come to Cliff Wrangham?

He couldn't honestly wish that. It wasn't fair to Cliff Wrangham or the Dixons. He'd had a very happy time there and done good work. Cliff Wrangham wasn't to blame.

Since Cliff Wrangham wasn't to blame, then, would he be prepared to wish that he had never come across the post-girl?

He'd have been bound to come across her.

Not if, for instance, she'd been ill, and somebody else had brought the letters.

He wouldn't wish anybody ill for the mere sake of saving his conscience.

Supposing she had been away, then?

Away where?

Anywhere.

But she hadn't been away, and so there was an end of it. He wasn't dealing with what might have been, but what was.

And what was?

He didn't know. He only knew that he wouldn't wish his worst enemy to be on the rack as he'd been on it all last night, and this morning. He hadn't slept a wink.

Why hadn't he slept?

Because he couldn't sleep.

But surely that was funny.

It wasn't funny at all. It was hell.

How could that be? If he found now that he'd been taking

a wrong moral turn, all he had to do was to turn back. His way was easy.

Was it?

It was . . . if he were sorry he'd gone wrong. Was he sorry that he'd gone wrong?

Of course he was sorry. The difficulty was he'd gone such a deuce of a long way wrong.

Ah! Longer, perhaps, than he'd said.

Not longer than he'd said, but quite long enough, without saying a word. To turn all the way back, at this stage of the proceedings—with explanation or without—was a desperately hard thing to do.

If duty compelled it, nevertheless?

Why should duty compel him to do anything so unpleasant?

But surely that was a strange way to speak of a duty which merely implied his obligation to the Other Girl. Presumably, as things stood, he loved her.

Presumably he did.

He had come to love her of his own free-will? It was not a case where he had been "rushed"? There was no solicitous mother or obliging sister in the case?

None at all. Only he had had larger opportunity to cultivate her acquaintance than in the general run of affairs. She was a distant connection of his by a remote marriage, who, in

On the contrary, she said he had acted nobly. He offered her her freedom, of course, as soon as he relinquished the mammon, but she would not accept it.

Had she said to him, for instance: "Dear Maurice, there have been times when I have been troubled to know which of you I loved; you or your uncle's money. And now that the horrid money's gone, I think it's you."

Yes, she had said that.

Did he tell her that it wasn't for beggars to be choosers, and that if she cared to have a musical pauper she could have him, and there'd be nothing to pay but his bills?

He believed he had made some witty allusion to that effect.

What did he call pauperdom?

He called two or three hundred a year pauperdom. With the assistance of a few pot-boiling songs under somebody else's name, including, to his shame be it said, a percentage of semi-sacred effusions with angels fluttering in the treble, and organ obbligato, he generally managed to supplement this. He also wrote a few elementary teaching pieces for a certain educational firm, under the reassuring title of Ivan Fedor Ivanowitch, which returned him a pittance. There was no demand for his two symphonies or his orchestral suite or his first piano concerto in *fa diese*. That's why he was writing another. Altogether, taking one thing with another, his income might be set down—except to the Inland Revenue—at about three hundred and fifty pounds a year. A man couldn't be much poorer than that, and talk, Heaven help him, of marriage.

And the Other Girl? Had she expectations at all?

He hoped not, for her own peace of mind. She had this aunt by marriage. Perhaps she might be able to call a couple of hundred pounds per annum her own some day. But it wouldn't be much more.

And how long had she been engaged to him?

Oh, he couldn't exactly say. Six or seven years. It had been an early and a lingering engagement.

Taking his statements into admission, one thing seemed very clear. He was under a strong moral obligation to the Other Girl.

He had never denied it.

Perhaps not, but his actions—judged superficially, of course—had shown a large tendency to overlook this obligation. However, let the past bury the past. He saw now the right way, and where he had strayed from it. Henceforth,

since his sole desire was to purge his spirit of its temporary faithlessness, and gain grace to win back his claim to the Other Girl's confidence, henceforth his path lay clear.

Where?

Where? Surely he had no necessity to ask that?

On the contrary, he did ask that.

But there could be no doubt in his mind. Any way that did not lead him back into the old temptation was the right way.

If coming across the post-girl was temptation, there was no way in this district that did lead the right way.

Then he must depart to where there was.

Leave Cliff Wrangham altogether?

Precisely.

Why should he leave Cliff Wrangham—that is, before the Other One returned? Was he an infant that he must be packed off into the corner in disgrace, because he couldn't be trusted?

He had proved himself an infant by the mere fact that he was no longer to be trusted. In other words, he had broken his trust.

He denied it. He'd broken nothing.

When a nursemaid, who's been warned, lets a child . . .

Oh, damn the nursemaid and the child too! Serve it jolly

CHAPTER XXXI

MANY readers—particularly those whose opinion of musicians is not of the highest at any time—may be tempted to decide upon the Spawer in his own words, and class him as a blackguard. But in this they would be wrong. Fools and children, they say, should never see things half done; and we must be very cautious about applying a definite title to any being struggling in the transitory stages of a great moral metamorphosis. For all we may know to the contrary, this dark moral obscurity which certainly, at the present moment, envelops the Spawer's being may be but the chrysalis to his soul; his soul may suddenly burst forth from its shroud of besetting doubt, take wings, and soar gloriously aloft into the clear ether of rectitude.

He had his bathe, but the salt water was all unfriendly, and there was no stimulus in its waves. It seemed to have deserted him at this hour of dark temptation. In ceaseless tussle the two of him returned along the sands and slowly back to Dixon's. Out of the drifting current of reasonings two things at least seemed clear. The conscience-bearer was dimly arguing for departure; the shuffling second self, that had been actively dodging investigation all this while, was trying to invent counter-arguments for delay.

The very life he was leading had become dear to him. He had lost slowly the desire to regain touch with the big centres of artistic activity, and seemed to be living somehow a purer life, in which he worked solely (or at least thought so) for Art's own sake. The ultimate success of this concerto troubled him little. Before, he had been building much on it, as the most promiseful fruit of his muse. Now, if it were scouted, if he and all his labours were scouted, there was the blessed sense of being able to return here for solace and shelter. The Dixons would be sorry to lose him, he felt sure; glad to have him back. The Vicarage door would open as soon as his figure came on to the vicarial territory in front of the iron rails; the bland, beneficent hand of his Reverence would receive him, like the lost lamb gathered into the fold. God

bless the Vicarage! His heart warmed, and his eye—a little emotionalised, it might be, by the crisis he was passing through—moistened as he thought upon that smallpox-blistered door, and the happiness that had been behind it. And last of all . . . there was Pam. What a soft and soothing cataplasm she was for all the soul's inflammations; for all the chafing irritation of spirit brought about by contact with a rough world. Her breath was balm, and her voice like a soft south wind blowing through the strings of a lute. All her freckles would cry aloud in welcome; her lips would disclose the pure, milky greeting of those white teeth; her hands—that he had, with amusement and exalted joy, watched struggling in their dear, feminine tirelessness with the contrary humours of Father Mostyn's keys—he knew what those hands would do when she heard of his return. They would clasp themselves and go beneath her chin. He had not noticed her for nothing. And then his mind went on to the shortening of the days; to the harvest gathered; to the crisp September; to the autumn, with its long, cosy evenings in the Vicar's room, and the music; to the winter; to Christmas; to the meetings; to the happiness; to the sea. . . .

And by Christmas . . . perhaps . . . he would be married.

Married!



the undesired, so much temptation to lie down and wallow in his own turbid mud, the soul of man manifests a strange tendency to rise to its full height of the heroic, and compounding its cup from the bitterest dregs of renunciation, drain it to the bottom, with eye on Heaven and hand dramatically on heart—though there be no witness to this fine exemplification of the tragic muse but man's self. Departure, the Spawer resolved, was the only thing to save him. The necessity was cruel, no doubt—to the Ullbrig girl, perhaps, as well as himself—but in the momentary lucidity of soul he had caught the glimpse of this as his sole honourable path, and he elected now to pursue it. To make the requisite retractions and yet stay on was out of the question. He could not bring himself to exercise those despicable economies of affection—palpable retrenchments even—in his friendship with the girl, lacking which, to remain in Ullbrig was not to stand still but to advance. No amount of mere passive rectitude could check the evolution of facts and circumstances. The world did not stand still because one chastened spirit resolved to hold back from the general march of iniquity. There was nothing for it. He would go.

Then imagination, intoxicated with the virtuous bitter draught he had drained, took wild flight into the future. He was going, truly, but not for long. Pam and this wife of his that was to be should become as sisters. He pictured Pam's coming to visit them. Long, glorious visits they should be. And he and Beatrice should return to Cliff Wrangham. They would make Cliff Wrangham their summer residence, their winter residence, their lifelong residence. Exaltation carried him to the pitch of bigamy even. In his wild desire to squeeze the last drop of happiness from these deadly sweet berries of fancy he was deaf to the voice of reason. He scarcely perceived whether it was Pam or the absent one that figured, in this glorified vision, as his wedded wife. At times, for all the power he possessed to discriminate, it might have been both. Or perhaps, with fine prophetic oversight of worldly institutions, he visioned a sublime state of platonic bliss in which was neither marrying nor giving in marriage. For extreme righteousness knows nothing of reason, nor does it argue. Arguments are but the beatings of its wings to gain impetus for flight, but the flight, once attained, transcends all logic. The sublime picture of married felicity that the Spawer created would have been the scandal of any decent, respectably constituted community. Had there been a dozen Pams,

indeed, he would have included them all in this spiritual harem, and yet—repugnant as this indiscriminate scheme of domestic association might appear to the many—there was no taint of earthly impurity in his conception of it.

Fortified with this blest vision of a paradise as reward for the pains of present righteousness, he swallowed a hasty and a tasteless meal, and set off without further thought or delay—lest the strength of resolve might in any way leak from him before his purpose was accomplished—down the Ullbrig road. For he knew that his composure was bearing a tremendous burden on its back, and he feared, if he retarded too long, it might break down, when ultimately he met the girl, into some stammering, faulty, broken-backed, weak-kneed, incomplete accomplishment of his mission. If possible, he wanted to drop across her as though by pure accident. He didn't want her to detect any traces of laboured premeditation in what he had to tell. He held the manner of the news-breaking roughly formulated in his mind, but he was anxious lest she might discern, through any flaw in the outer agreement of his smiles (just sufficently tinged with regret, he told himself, to be in keeping with the subject of departure, but no more), the horrible machinery, driven by a thousand heart-power, clanking away inside him, and manufacturing this leave-taking to pattern, like rolled steel.

CHAPTER XXXII

SHE wore a great hat of coarse Zulu straw, trimmed with white muslin and scarlet poppies, and a pale cream muslin dress, beneath whose hem her neat shoes and trim, black ankles showed themselves so demurely, like sleek twin witches of seductive enchantment. In her left hand she carried a snowy-topped basket emblematic of Faith, Hope, and Charity —particularly this last—while the thumb of her cotton-gloved right hand was tucked, at the time of their recognition, into a green crocodile leather belt. She was just passing the corner, indeed, as she caught sight of the Spawer, and had to fall back on her heel to verify the impression; then she stood waiting for him, swinging the basket in front of her skirt with both hands, and showing the glad smile for a welcome and unexpected meeting. All the gloomy necessities of the encounter were packed up and stowed away at the back of the Spawer's being with the first slight shock of realisation. Almost spontaneously he discarded his reflections as though they had been impersonal and bearing no reference to the girl before him, and advanced upon her with the sunny face that seemed never to have known the clouds of disquietude.

"How funny," said Pam simply, as he came near. "... I was just thinking about you."

"I can see you were," he laughed.

"Can you?" asked Pam, smiling, but a shade incredulous.

"By your ears," he told her.

Pam put her fingers to them.

"It is the sun," she said, nipping a little crimson lobe between cool white-cottoned fingers. "Yours burn too. Were you thinking about me?"

"Perhaps."

"Were you? What were you thinking?"

"Tell me first what you were thinking about me?"

"I was thinking whether I should see you if I looked up the Cliff Wrangham road. But I never thought I should. And you?"

"I was thinking the same thing."

"Were you really? Did you want to see me . : . about anything?"

It was the Spawer's opportunity to say what he had come to say, but like a faint-hearted jumper, feeling he had not bite enough for his purpose, he burked the hurdle.

"I don't know that I wanted to see you . . . about anything," he answered, covering up his momentary hesitation with a smile, " . . . but I was perfectly agreeable to see you about nothing at all."

" Perhaps you're coming to the post?" Pam hazarded.

"Nothing so reputable," said he. " Fact is, I'm afraid I've broken loose to-day. I'm on the laze."

" You lazy!" laughed Pam, in incredulous amazement.

" Oh, horribly lazy, dear girl," he said. " If you don't know that you don't know me. It comes on at periods. I can't yet decide whether my hard work is sheer activity of a guilty conscience, or my laziness is the collapse of a conscience too highly taxed, but the one follows the other as night follows day. I've not done a stroke of work since getting up. This morning I washed myself and bathed—you'll say that's a good work done. This afternoon I determined to stroll inland and see if there was anybody disposed to take pity on my sad idleness. What a pretty basket!"

Pam held it up for his inspection.

"Come," said the Spawer, relieved, "that doesn't sound so alarming. I'll risk it. And are the bottles his or ours?"

"His," said Pam, as the Spawer disengaged her of them, and they commenced to walk forward together. "Poor old gentleman. There's a lemon jelly and a bottle of port and a bottle of whisky. Those are from Father Mostyn—the very same that he drinks himself." Her eyes kindled luminously at the mention. "Isn't it good of him? Nobody knows but me what lots of things he gives away . . . and what lots of things he does for people. He'd do anything for anybody. They don't understand him in Ullbrig a bit. I didn't always, but I do now. They talk about his house, and say it wants painting. And of course it does. And they say he's a Roman Catholic, and gets paid by the Pope for every conversion he makes; but that's not true. He's nothing at all to do with the Pope. And then they laugh at him because he goes down on his knees in church, but as he said one day to Mr. Stevens (Sheppardman): 'You touch your hat to me because I'm his reverence the vicar, but you're too proud to bow to the Lord Jesus.' And it's not a matter of what he does in church. They oughtn't to go by that—and they can't truthfully, because they're never there to see. It's what he does in Ullbrig. If anybody's ill, it's always him they send for, and he always goes, whether it's by night or day. When they're well he talks about their hypocrisy and their sinfulness, and about their pride—you've heard him, haven't you? But when they're ill . . . oh, you wouldn't know him. He's as gentle as a woman. He looks at their medicine, and feels their pulse, and smooths their pillow; and oh, he talks so beautifully. When little Annie Summers died of diphtheria he sat up all the night after the operation, keeping her throat clear with a feather (that was very dangerous, of course, and he might have died of it), and when she was dead her father told him: 'I've never given you a good word all my days, Mr. Mostyn,' and Father Mostyn only shook his head and told him: 'Well, well, John, give it me now.' And when poor old James Marshall was dying they sent for Father Mostyn, of course, and James told him he was a bit fearsome he hadn't done the right thing in spending so much of his time at chapel. And Father Mostyn said: 'Make your mind easy, James, there are no churches or chapels up there.' Old Mr. Smethurst used to go to chapel too, when he was well enough to go anywhere, but as Father Mostyn says, we can't help that. The wine will do him as

much good as if he had been to church. And it was a long time ago. He'll never go there any more."

"Is he so ill as that?" asked the Spawer.

"He's dying," said Pam.

The little tremor of her lip, and the sudden moistness about her eyes—though he had witnessed these wonderful manifestations of her tender nature before on many an occasion—went to the Spawer's heart in the present instance like an arrow. Pam's tears were in everybody's service. Not idle tears, but tears that seemed the sacred seal of noble self-sacrifice and devotion.

And to think he was so soon going to remove himself from the soft-dropping springs of their sympathy.

"What a ministering angel you are," he said, looking at her lightly enough, and yet—though Pam could not know that—with a kind of tightness about the throat.

"I'm afraid I'm not an angel," the girl regretted. "Not a bit of one. I wish I were."

"On the contrary," he said, "wish nothing of the kind."

"Why not?" she asked.

"Because Ullbrig would miss you so. Angels' visits are few and far between, and when they come they don't bring bottles. Be what you are," he told her. "A lay angel."

glad when you'd gone and done it. How did that apply to him?

". . . Father Mostyn says you must beware of doing kindnesses for the mere gratification of being thanked. He says that's a deadly sin—one of the prides of Charity. There are a lot more, but that's the worst. What do you think?"

"What do I think? Gracious!" laughed the Spawer, "I daren't contradict his Reverence. I think so too."

"But it's awfully hard to avoid," Pam went on. "I'll tell you. Once I made Father Mostyn a cake. It was for his birthday, and it had *so* thick of almond icing on the top"—she defined the width for him with thumb and finger—"and had lots of cherry-plums inside. All the top was worked in with white sugar flowers, and round the side I wrote, 'Many happy returns of the day,' in cochineal lettering. And when I took it to him, he only looked at it and said: 'What have you made this for?' I told him: 'For your birthday, Father, with my love.' But he shook his head and said: 'Think again, dear child.' And I thought again, and said: 'For your birthday, Father, with my very best love.' And he said: 'Ah!' so sadly. I can hear him now 'Or is it for your own pride, dear child? Have you put all these sugar plums in so that you may hear me praise your confectionery? and worked all these beautiful flowers so that your vanity may be glorified in hearing his reverence extol your handiwork?' And then, suddenly, I didn't know which it was. I knew that all the time I'd been making the cake I was wondering what he would say when he saw it, and whether he would notice the wording, and what he would think of the flowers at the top. And I burst into tears —I remember it so well—and told him it was all my pride. Oh, I did cry; I felt so wicked. And while I cried he talked to me beautifully till I felt I wanted to go on crying for ever. You don't know how beautifully he can talk to you when you've done anything wrong. He talks you round till you feel, somehow, sad and sorry, and yet better than ever you felt in your life before. It seems as though you could never do anything wicked again. And when I'd cried long enough, he said: 'Now, dear child, I think you've washed your slate clean of its vanity. Sit down and let's eat your pride.' And he cut me a large slice, and took a slice himself. And that same day, I remember, we walked up to Shippus—as we're walking now—and had tea. And I made up my mind I'd never do anything for pride again."

"And of course you never have done?"

"I'm afraid I have, often," she lamented. "It seems as though you can't help it. Only the other night—after we'd been at Father Mostyn's, don't you remember, and the Doctor came in while you were playing the nocturne—I found some work of Emma's that wanted doing when I got back. It was the bodice of an electric blue dress that she was making, and I knew she wanted it for trying on next day. So I sat up and finished it. Somehow, I wanted to do it for her sake (because you don't know how good she is to me), but every stitch I took I couldn't help thinking to myself how pleased she would be when she found the work done, and what she would say to me, and how she would thank me. Once I almost thought of putting the work aside, because it seemed I was merely doing it to be praised, but I knew, whether it was wrong of me or not, that Emma would be glad to find it finished, and I persevered. You know the feeling, don't you?"

"Great stars!" said the Spawer. "How scrupulously you strain your milk of human kindness! I'm afraid mine's drawn straight from the cow, hairs and all—except for a little added water in it. I can't recall any particular cases of kindness to mind as examples just now, but if I could you'd be shocked to find what a horribly mundane brute I am. Either I do my kindnesses through ignorance, I'm afraid, or I do them because

little errors of excess in a grand sum of cruelty, that had brought the total to an amount he dared scarcely contemplate, and were compelling him this day to cancel these labyrinthine workings of arithmetic by a wholesale application of the sponge?

"That," said he, looking leniently upon her, "is because your kindness, little woman, won't let you find flaws in mine. But there are flaws in it—great flaws."

"Where?" asked Pam, with the earnestness of a child.

A child she was, with a child's large heart—that great nursery-space for unrestrained affections—that gives way among other girls, into the discreet, prim, drawing-room of carefully selected conventional furniture of friendships.

"All over," said the Spawer.

"You have always been kind to me," said Pam.

"Don't let's talk of that," he responded cheerfully, affecting—double-dyed hypocrite that he knew himself to be—a sublime disregard of such kindnesses as had been his, which but served to illuminate his conduct in the girl's eyes with letters of celestial gold paint.

"Mayn't I talk to you about it . . . ever, please?" the girl asked him.

"Oh, if it's a question of pleases," he said, with laughing concession, "I wouldn't deny you for worlds. Talk away, dear child."

Did he realise how much store the girl set by these diminutive titles of affectionate address? Did he know that each time he called her "Dear child" and "Dear girl" and "Little woman" (mere friendly substitutes for the Pam he never used) her heart leaped up in responsive gladness? Did he know that each of these designations, so lightly uttered by him, was a nail driven into the door against his departure, and that door the girl's own heart? Surely and truly he never knew it, or even our hero, Maurice Ethelbert Wynne, for all his blackguardism, would have shrunk from the usage of them.

"Now I don't know what to say," Pam said.

"Why ever not?"

"Because you told me to talk away."

"How like a girl! Wants to do a thing until she's bidden, and then . . . be hanged if she will. You contrairy little feminine."

All the same, as soon as he adjured her not to mind, but to say no more about it, she found plenty to say in a sudden

gush respecting his past kindness to her. He had been so good to her. She had told Father Mostyn to be *sure* and tell him how grateful she felt to him for all his goodness. Had he done so?

"Oh, come, come! Do you trust him so little as that?" laughed the Spawer.

She trusted him in everything . . . except, perhaps, the bearing of messages. He wasn't so accustomed to carry them as to send them.

Ah, well, this time his Reverence hadn't failed her. He had told him everything.

. . . Had he? But she had been dying to tell him herself too. And somehow, whenever she had begun, he had always turned her off so kindly that she had never done any more than tell him that she wanted to tell him, and never told him; but to-day, when he had spoken about *her* kindness, she felt she must tell him about his. There had been no reason why he should have been kind to her. He had done it all so beautifully . . . that there seemed nothing in it, and at times she'd almost believed that there was nothing in it either, and that it was just happening so, and no more. But when she'd come to look into it she saw exactly how much there was, and how it could have happened otherwise—oh, quite otherwise—but for his great kindness in preventing it. Why had he been

"It was all of it goodness."

"Nothing of the sort, dear girl. It's all pure selfish pride."

Oh, no, no, no! Pam couldn't believe that.

Oh, but she must believe it. He'd given her lessons solely for his own pleasure—not hers—because teaching her had interested him, and it was a sort of recreation. And he'd taught her French for the same reason, and for the pride of being looked up to as a great French authority. And he'd given her books and music so that she might say what a kind, generous fellow he was. Dear child, he told her honour bright now, if it hadn't been that the balance of the scales weighed on the side of his own enjoyment—the enjoyment of talking to her (he really enjoyed talking to her, she was such an unsophisticated angel of credulity) and teaching her (because she showed such a delicious anxiety to learn, and such a refreshing enthusiasm that it was like a lantern to his own)—if it hadn't been for these things, that he'd got ample interest for his invested capital, oh, she mustn't make any mistake about the matter, it was precious little goodness she'd have found about him. Oh, he was a bad one at heart!

So, arguing agreeably on the subject of goodness specific and general, they walked along the high-road lane that leads to Shippus. The sky was blue overhead and the air so languid hot that it scarcely stirred to their passage through it. An endless orchestra of grasshoppers fiddled in the hot grass at the roots of the hedges between which they passed, choked with the undisturbed dust of Sunday's waggonettes that had conveyed an extra quota of Hunmouth inebriates to mop their Sabbath beer by the sea. From all quarters the combined music of indistinguishable minstrels rises up into the dense sunlight, till this soothing hum of subdued activity seems a very part of the sunlight itself. Bees swing across the roadway, from hedge to hedge, with no sense of individual motion at all, but as though they were lazily pendulous from an invisible thread. Unperceived sparrows fall swiftly out of the stagnant, close branches of Noah's Ark trees in a swift, noiseless shower, while at moments the note of a robin or a wren trickles in delicious coolness through the leaves of his shelter, and is swallowed up thirstily by the smothered air. The sound of the indefatigable reapers, whirring amid the wheat stalks with the heavy-headed grain toppling and breaking in a foamy wave over the advancing blades, is scarcely ever stilled. Now it looms out near and distinct; now it sinks and fades where they dip into the hollow of the field, pursued by the

dematerialised voices of the harvesters and the barking of dogs. Sometimes, as the road rises, and the hedges drop down beneath the level of its embankment, Pam and the Spawer can see the straw hats of the rakers and the arms of the band-makers working like semaphores in the track of the reaper. From here, too, is obtainable one of the best views of Ullbrig. Many hedges, rising interceptively, tier above tier, give the place a gladsome, green-embowered look, with its picturesque splashes of red tile and brick, and its topping of grey church tower—that gazes over here with its blind eye, the clock being on the other side.

Thus, walking amid these sights and sounds, they came at last upon a group of two or three detached cottages along the roadside, white-washed and blinding, with thatched roofs and tarred palings, and a profusion of giant nasturtiums clambering over the doors and licking at the window-sills with a great yellow-scarlet blaze, as though the porches were on fire. Here Pam slowed up, and held out her hand for the basket.

"Shall you be long?" the Spawer asked, giving it her.

"Perhaps you won't care to wait?" she suggested wistfully, though offering him his liberation.

"Trot along," said he, smiling back refusal of the proffered freedom. "I'll hang about outside for you. Only promise me you won't slip away by the back."



noise; her footsteps merge in yours; but day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment, she never leaves you. The time approaches when she shall rise up in her hideous deformity and declare you a prisoner in her dwelling. And you shall gaze upon the features of an altered world through wet windows of running tears.

CHAPTER XXXIII

OUTSIDE the Spawer strolled gently to and fro along the white, staring roadway, stopping always a little short of the cottages lest his constant recurrence in face of the window might seem like an embargo upon Pam's moments. To a casual observer he looked, in his light flannels and straw hat—tilted a little over his nose for facing the sun—the typical figure of a summer lounger, with no endeavour beyond indolence, and no thought above keeping cool. But within, his brain was busily clanking and clamouring, like an overpressed newspaper office; editing, sub-editing, inserting, deleting, putting all his conduct into orderly columns and making ruthless "pi" of it; printing off nightmare editions, only to suppress them still-born; arguing the policy of the paper; shifting it, contracting it, amplifying it. Lord, a sickening pother of sweating, loathsome industry! One item of intelligence alone remained stable amid the vast jumble of worthless, inconsequential paragraphs:

DEPARTURE OF THE SPAWER.

"I thought you wouldn't," Pam said, more to herself, as though his reply constituted a refusal of something not uttered, but in her mind only. And still she stood; and while she looked at the Spawer her eyes filled with that sublime wistfulness of theirs that finds no translation in words. "That's not all," she said, after a pause. "I haven't told you. They know . . . who you are."

"Jove!" exclaimed the Spawer. "What a reputation I have in this part of the globe. If only it were universal."

"It's my fault . . ." Pam confessed.

"There's no fault about it, dear girl," he made haste to reassure her. "On the contrary, it's a jolly kind thought."

"But I'm afraid . . . I told them it was you when they asked if it was. And they know how beautifully you play." Her eyes were absolutely sealed down upon his now, so that not a flicker of their expression could escape her. ". . . And . . . and poor old Mr. Smethurst said there weren't many that could play like you. And I told him, indeed there weren't. And I was telling him how beautifully you did play . . . and all of a sudden he said he should just like to hear you play 'Sound the loud timbrel' . . . before he died. Did I think you would? And Mrs. Smethurst was frightened, and said: 'Oh, John, you mustn't ask such things of a gentleman like that. He doesn't play to such as us.' And he said, oh, so sadly: 'Nay, nay, I suppose I mustn't. But I feel he'd do it if only we dared ask him.' And I didn't know what to say . . . because, of course, I know it's a dreadful thing to ask you. But I made a pretence of coming out to see whether you would come in and sit down."

The Spawer wrinkled his brows.

"It's not so much the asking," he said, with a perplexed smile, "but it's the doing, little woman. Have they a pianoforte?"

"No, no." Pam sank deeper into her trouble. "It's only a harmonium . . . a very old one. I know it's a dreadful thing to ask you to sit down to a harmonium—and a hymn tune too. I'd never, never have asked you to do such a thing for myself—but for somebody else that's never going to get better again. Sometimes it does sick people you don't know how much good to have their fancies gratified. I offered to try and play it myself, but he told me: 'You can play it and welcome . . . but it won't be him.'"

"Little woman," said the Spawer, "no one knows better

than you what an act of martyrdom it is for a pianist to sit down to a harmonium and humble himself to a hymn tune. But because it's you that have asked me, for your sake and through sheer pride—to show you how good I am—I'll do it. It sounds good, but it's sheer, downright pride, remember. Only pride could get through with it. Now; lead on, kindly light."

He took hold of her indulgently by the arm, and for a few paces walked so with her. To the girl that touch was the crowning patent of his nobility and goodness; to him it was so magnetically charged with the dangerous communion of red, warm blood that he let go of it by slow, imperceptible degrees, but with no less the feeling that he was discarding a deadly temptation. The warmth of a woman's body is an enervating atmosphere to the moral fibres of a man when that body is the object of his renunciation, and his fibres are slackened to start with. And the proud illumination about the girl's eyes as she went forward at his instigation was like the high, bright blaze of a lighthouse for holding him prisoner to its beacon against all the futile beating of his wings.

Through the tarred gate and under the trailing flames of nasturtium Pam led him into the cottage of the dying man. It was a kitchen living-room they stepped into. All about the threshold and nasturtium porch was enveloped in its own stifling atmosphere of hot leaves and baking, so distinct from

away from the red spot on the hearthrug where he had at first observed them. The invalid's breathing was the laboured wheezy usage of lungs that bespoke asthma and bronchitis, and the hands that clasped the arms of the wooden chair might have been carved in horn. A couple of crooked sticks placed in the projecting angle of the range showed his extremity in the matter of locomotion. To the Spawer, whose experience with the dark obverse of life's bright medallion was restricted, and whose acquaintance with death and death's methods was more by hearsay, as of some notorious usurer, the picture was not a pleasant one. He had rather been left out in the pure sunshine with his own tormenting thoughts than be brought face to face with the actual draught that all men mortal must drain. And yet, he told himself, this was the sort of thing that Pam was almost daily sacrificing some portion of her young life to; giving generously a share of her own freshness and healthfulness and vitality to keep burning these wan and flickering flames. Wonder of wonder, the magic chalice of a woman's heart, that can pour forth its crystalline stream of love and comfort and consolation, and yet not run dry.

An elderly woman, in a print dress, whose hands were nervously fingering with the jet brooch at her throat, and who seemed employed in watching the door with a smile not devoid of anxiety, curtseyed with painful respectfulness at the Spawer's entrance, and dusting the surface of a wooden chair, begged him to be seated. If he had lacked Pam's assurance that his presence was coveted he might have almost reproached himself for entering at some inopportune moment. A great air of formality seemed to enter with his advent, and stiffen all about them—he felt it himself—as though they were on the brink of some important ceremony with whose procedure they were unacquainted, like Protestants at High Mass. He took the chair, however, with the utmost friendliness and thankfulness he could assume, and tried to sit down upon it with a pleasant air of relief, as though it were a welcome accessory to his comfort, and he were grateful. He was very anxious, for his pride's sake, to do Pam credit.

"Ah!" he said, seeming to welcome the discovery of the fire as something, in these chill times to be glad for, and addressing himself to the sick man, made pleasant allusion to it. "You keep a bit of a blaze, I see," he said.

"Ye'll 'a to speak up tiv 'im a bit, sir," the woman instructed him deferentially. "'E weean't a 'eard ye. 'E's gettin' that deaf it's past mekkin' 'im understand at times."

The man's head turned slowly in its grey woollen socket, as though he had caught the fact of his being in question, but were out of the reach of the inquiry, and seeking by the petition of his eye to be informed.

"'E's speakin' about fire, gentleman is," the woman told him.

"What fire?" the sick man asked, in a frail, piping voice—a voice that a three-days' chicken might almost have challenged.

He asked the question mechanically, with his eyes on the Spawer, but his interest lay somewhere beyond the borderland of earthly things, as though his mind, through much solitude of wandering, had strayed in advance of his body towards the bourne of them both, and was recalled to the flesh with increasing difficulty.

"Kitchen fire," his wife explained to him. "Fire i' grate yonder."

The man followed the line of her knotted, bony forefinger, and let his eyes fall on the wasted red cinders, so symbolical of his own condition.

"Ay," he said, after a moment, when it had almost come to seem that the connection between finger and fireplace was quite lost. "Fire's a bit o' company to me. We've been good friends a goodish piece noo, but ah s'll not need 'er so

she told the Spawer. "Doctor says it's about worn out. Ay, poor man, poor man! What a thing it is to sit an' watch 'im gan, ah-sure. An' 'im so active as 'e was. Bud cryin' weean't alter it, for ah've tried, an' it's no use. It's Lord's will, an' we mun just be thankful 'at 'E's spared 'im as long as 'E 'as, wi' me to look after 'im an' see 'e gans off comfortable. There's monny 'at isn't blessed so well as that."

The sick man fastened his eye on the Spawer again.

"Ye come fro' Dixon's?" he said inquiringly; and when the Spawer gave him an illuminative "Yes"—"Ay," he said, through his thin lips. "It's long enough sin' ah seed 'im. Mebbe ye'll do me the kindness to gie 'im mah respecks when ye get back. Monny's the time 'im an' me's met i' Oommuth market an' driven wum (home) i' Tankard' bus together. Ay, bud them days is gone. 'E'll not 'elp me up Tankard steps no more, noo, an' gie me my sticks after me. Next time ah gan to Oolbrig ah s'll manage wi'oot sticks. Ah'm no better nor a little bairn noo . . . me that could lift a 'eifer very nigh. Ay, she's been a good un to me, yonder, for all my bad ways. She's wokked (worked) for me . . . ay . . . 'arder nor one o' my 'osses, when ah 'ad 'em. An' ah sewd 'a 'ad 'em noo, if onnly ah'd letten 'er 'ave 'er way. An' she's put up wi' me . . . when ah wor nowt but a bad, drunken cuddy . . . an' brought up a big family o' bairns. . . . Noo ah'm last bairn she 'as. Ah've been nowt bud trouble tiv 'er sin' day she wor fond enough to tek me, an' she wouldn't 'a tekken me then, bud ah begged ower 'ard. An' ah'm nowt bud trouble tiv 'er noo. Coughin' an' spittin' o' neets, an' coughin' an' spittin' o' days, an' tekkin' more lookin' after nor a babby."

"Ay, an' ah'd tek ye agen, lad," the thin, worn woman told him, with an assurance that was almost fierce. "Ne'er mind whether ye're a bad un or no. Ah've nivver rued day ah tekt ye—though ye'd gie'n me twice trouble ye did. Ah mud 'ave looked far to fin' a better, an' then not fun' (found) 'im. Let ye be as drunk as ye would, ye nivver gied me a bad wod nor lifted 'and agen me."

"Nay, ah nivver lifted 'and agen ye," the man assented. "Ah 'adn't need. Bud that's little to my credit. Ah trailed ye thruff tribulation. What time ye wasn't workin' to mek good what ah'd wasted ye was weepin' an' waitin' o' me. There's scarcelins a Saturday neet, at one time, ye set oot wi' a dry eye."

"Ay, bud ye nivver stayed away ower Sunday," his wife claimed, with pride. "Ye was allus back an' to spare when

Oolbrig bells got set o' ringin'. An' it's not ivvery man's wife about this district 'at can say same of 'er 'usband."

The sick man listened to her, and a pale, wintry smile flickered across his face and over his frost-nipped lips. Years ago, perhaps, it had been a smile as full of sunlight as the Spawer's own, and dear to the woman's heart. Perhaps her soul had pined for that very smile, and drunk of its remembrance, in the dark hours that clouded her life from time to time. The sick man turned his eyes upon the Spawer, while yet the feeble ray illuminated them.

"Ah didn't chose so badlins," he said, with a tinge of the dry humour that sparkles mirthfully in the men of these parts like the crackling of blazing twigs under a pot. "Nay, ah got best o' bargain when she fastened 'ersen. Chosin' a wife's same as chosin' a mare or owt else, an' there's a deal o' ways o' chosin' wrong. Don't tek notice o' way a lass gans on tiv you, if ye want to pick a good un—for they're all t' same when they're carryin' on wi' a man. Good uns an' bad uns acts alike then. Bud tek notice o' way she gans on wi' them about 'er. If she's gotten a kind tongue for them 'at's brought 'er up, an' for them 'at she's n' occasion to be kind to, there's nowt much amiss wi' 'er. Divn't tek a woman 'at fin's ower much fault wi' 'er neighbours—syke a woman'll fin' plenty wi' you when she's gotten ye fast. Ye want to 'ave a sharp eye

wept in spirit over his own spirit's weakness. And yet, as he asked himself very naturally, even as he held his smile towards the old man, and studiously away from the girl that fulfilled (either in actuality or in the guilty similarity set up by his soul) every condition of the old fellow's warning—was this the proper moment to declare to her what he had to declare to her? Could he for the first time acquaint her with facts for which she was all unprepared before strangers? No, no, no. Later on, he swore it, he would fulfil his afternoon's mission. He was merely a musician, he told himself, using destiny as his fiddle, tuning the strings of circumstance to the tune needed of him. When all the occasions were in accord, come what might, he would play his melody and take what Fate threw in the cap. A procrastination, so long as his mind never swerved from the object set and undertaken, was not necessarily cowardice. Nay, more. As every delay added to the ultimate sum total of the task, he was a braver man. And to prove his bravery, in the pause that ensued upon the old man's counselling and his own acquiescence, he girded his loins to that minor task—scarcely less odious—which he had undertaken . . . why? For humanity? For the girl? He knew well enough that the whole burden of this nearer duty lay upon his own shoulders. He might sit in the chair till nightfall, rise and take his departure, and no word be hinted from any one present that he had broken an unnamed promise. So, catching sight of the little despicable harmonium for the hundredth time, with the suddenly sparkling eye for a revelation, "What," said he, in accents of surprised pleasure that even deceived Pam—(though he dared not have thought it)—"a harmonium?"

The old woman whipped off its meagre tippet of oilcloth in a twinkling, and displayed its poor double octave of discoloured celluloid with a toothless smile of proud possession.

"Mester bought it," she said. "He was allus fond of a bit o' music."

How was she to know, poor soul, the strickening effect that fatal use of the diminutive had on the sensitive fibres of the Spawer's nature? Not from his face, surely, for he smiled pure sunlight. And yet, though launched from the quiver of well-meaning ignorance, that "fond of a bit o' music" twanged straight into his vitals like the arrow that flieth. In the mouths of these people music was always a "bit of a thing," an inappreciable chipped fragment of happiness; a trifling transitory joy. To hear these mean intelligences speak with

the mere indulgence for a pastime no better than duck-stone or tip-cat, of an art so limitless and supreme that it spread eternally above them like the sky itself, never failed, however much he forgave their ignorance, to make the Spawer wince beneath his smiles. To these people music was no more than a mere compression of keys, a trick of blowing into mouth-holes, a scraping of catgut with the tail-hairs of a horse. How could such beings reconcile his earnest life-work with the lightest and most inconsequential of their pleasures? His soul shrank at the thought of manifesting itself seriously on such a medium, and to such an audience, but he fortified it with the consolation that this was no act of music, but an act of human charity.

They dusted the keys for him, and a chair, and put up the fragile desk, that subsided like a schooner before the blast, with its masts bending, and the Spawer sat down and did his best.

Heavens, what a best!

The very tone of the instrument that cried out under his touch shocked his soul and almost frightened his fingers from the keys. So raucous it was; so noisily sanctimonious; so redolent of blind musicians; of street-corner meetings; so unblushingly bald; so callous; so unsensitive; so ostentatious; so utterly awful. Every nerve, fibre, and tissue of musical

Not one witness in a thousand, drawn independently to consider the scene, would have pierced to the heart of the pathos, and grasped through the tearful confusion of their sympathies, that perhaps the most beautiful focus-point of emotion was in the seated figure of the musician, castigating his musical soul with biting thongs for the sake of one girl and a dying man, and showing no sign.

And what recompense of moral gratification did he receive in return for his act of artistic abnegation? Little enough, it must be confessed, that the Spawer could discover. The old man looked older, he thought; the old woman's prefatory smile of appreciative pride had been quenched by the music, and her attitude when he turned round upon her was the incomprehending silence of respect. All her face, so to speak, had fallen to pieces like an over-shortened pie, with no concentration of interest to hold up the crust of its expression. Perhaps the very harmonies with which the Spawer had clad the naked melody of a hymn-tune had so baffled their decaying, primitive hearing that they had failed to recognise it in its new garb. He had done better, possibly, to play the melody out for them with one finger. Pam's face alone compensated him. She, he knew—and was glad to know—was too much awakened to the scope and magnitude of music to have derived anything approaching personal pleasure from a crude performance such as this; but she had realised what nausea it must have been to him, and in the light of a sacrifice alone she had rejoiced in his achievement.

Well, however, the achievement was over, and they were ready to go any time now. The old woman replaced the oil-cloth over the harmonium with a look of relief (or so the Spawer thought, but he thought wrong), and Pam was just opening her lips to suggest departure when the old man piped out in his faltering treble:

"Ay, bud ye'll gie me a chapter before ye gan, lass, weean't ye?"

Pam turned a troubled eye part-way towards the Spawer, as though it were accompanying a thought of hers on its own account; but she stopped it before it reached him, and dropped submissive hands.

"Would you like me to?" she asked gently.

"Ay; ah s'd tek it kindly if ye would."

"You don't mind?" she asked the Spawer softly; and with his assent, readily given, "I will," she said.

"Gie 'er the Book, lass," he ordered his wife; and the

careworn woman lifted it from beneath a pair of folded spectacles, and delivered it reverently into the girl's receiving fingers.

"What shall I read you?" Pam asked, setting the book on her knees, and turning over the pages, now backwards, now forwards.

"Ah'll 'ave that bit o' John," he told her, "about mansions an' such-like, if ye've no objections."

"Is that the fourteenth chapter?" Pam suggested inquiringly. "Didn't we have it last time?"

"Ay, an' we mud as lief 'ave it this," he decided placidly. "It'll be none the wuss of a time or two. Book's not same as other things. There's allus seummut fresh in it for them 'at gans tiv it wi' a right 'eart. Ah s'd 'a done better if ah'd ganned tiv it when ah 'ad use o' legs Lord gid me. It's ower late to larn me to walk straight i' this wuld noo, bud 'appen ah s'll be about ready to scrammle along to next, when time comes."

"The fourteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John," Pam announced, as signifying that she had found the place, and smoothing down the page with her soft finger, lifted her voice and read:

"Let not your heart be troubled. . . . Ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a

wondered, as he saw it, that the girl could proceed so courageously and so unfalteringly on her consolatory path. He himself would have fared along it badly, and knew it. But it was not the last time he was to marvel at the girl's self-possession when circumstances demanded, and perhaps this second time he would remember it even better.

"Ye'll tek liberty to call agen, mebbe," the old man invited him as they stood finally for departure, ". . . if ah'm not mekkin' ower free to ask ye; bud it's a lonely road when a man draws to yend of 'is days. Busy folk can't reckon to be treubled wi' 'im—an' i' 'arvest an' all. Ah wor no better mysen when ah 'ad my faculties. Ye'll be stayin' wi' Dixon a goodish while yet, mebbe?"

At the direct question the Spawer's resolution spun round and made as though to turn tail. There was just a slight pause—quite inappreciable to the others about him, but painfully magnified to himself—while he struggled whether to ignore the opportunity or seize it like a man, and sign irrevocably the bond of his departure.

"Perhaps . . ." he was quibbling with the reply even yet, while speaking, not knowing whether to evade or to grapple with his chance. Then he grappled suddenly, but always with that frank, pleasant smile of his that showed no inkling of an inward perplexity. ". . . On the other hand," he said, ". . . it's possible I may be going any time now—any day even." He sensed rather than saw the quick turn of the girl's eyes upon him, and knew, too, in what kind of mild, protesting surprise she was looking at him. She could not credit that he should first communicate such an important piece of intelligence to strangers, without having prepared her by a single word, and was wondering sorrowfully whether it were not an excuse to evade any promise of visiting the old man again.

"It all depends," the Spawer explained, throwing his explanation over the truth of the matter like a pleasant nebula, ". . . on a letter. I'm expecting to hear. One can't stay for ever, you know," he added amiably, "even where one's happy."

"Nay, nay," the old man acquiesced mournfully. "When a man comes to my years 'e fin's that oot tiv 'is sorrer. Well, well; ah awpe (hope) when ye think fit to change ye'll change for t' better, young gen'leman, an' ah thank ye for yer company an' yer kindness." He turned the faint flicker of his long-ago smile upon Pam, like the sunlight stealing over an autumn

landscape. "Pam's not likely to change yet a bit," he said, with a sense of comfort in the thought, as though the girl were a true staff to rest on in time of trouble. Pam shook her head reassuringly. "Nay, Pam mun't change yet a bit," he admonished her. "She mun stop an' see t' old man's time oot, ah think. 'E weean't keep 'er so long noo, but 'e's a selfish old chap; 'e dizzn't want to part wi' 'er no sooner nor need be. She's been as good tiv 'im as if she'd been 'is own bairn. Ay, an' better. There's not monny bairns 'at 'ud 'a done as much—an' said as little. Nay, nay; they'd 'a telt 'im 'e was a treublesome old feller long sin'. Good-bye, lass; good-bye—an' gie my respecks tiv 'is Rivrence when 'e comes back."

His eye kindled momentarily as the girl laid light fingers on the horny right hand and stooped and kissed him. But the light of this died out of them as soon as he had done speaking, and the pressure of her clasp relaxed. As they passed out of the kitchen his gaze followed them dimly from afar, seeming to inquire who were these figures departing, and whence came they and what their errand, and in what remote, unintelligible degree their presence concerned himself.

CHAPTER XXXIV

FOR a short space the Spawer and Pam walked along in silence, but sharing the same thought, as though they made joint use of an umbrella. The stillness of a great Sunday had fallen over them; like communicants of the Blessed Sacrament of Charity, they walked away a little hushed, each treasuring the remembrance of the other's goodness; each trying to retain undissipated those elusive sky-colours of exaltation that at length must melt and fade away, however carefully cherished, into the dull grey of daily life.

And between here and the joining of the roads at Hesketh's corner the Spawer was pledged to sign the document of departure.

In two odd miles of green-bordered laneway he was to waft all their charitable illusion on one side with the rude hand of resolve, like the intrusive fumes of rank tobacco, rather than the blessed clouds of incense, and make a clear path for his shuffling feet to walk in.

He stole a look down the side of his nose at the girl by his elbow. If her clear face had been a window, and he a contemptible urchin whose purpose was a stone secreted in the palm of his hostile hand, he could not have put it behind his back with greater shame or remorse when she looked up at him.

"Hello!" he said, drawing up in their equable stride with a fine pretence of awakening consciousness to the trend of their steps. "Where on earth are we hurrying off to so fast?"

The girl drew up too, and sought his face inquiringly.

"Home . . . aren't we?" she suggested, with a gentle stirring of surprise at his need for the question.

"Are you so anxious to get rid of me?" he asked.

"I? Oh, no . . . I wasn't thinking about that."

"Let's think about it now, then," he prompted agreeably. "Truth to tell, little woman, you've made me feel such a very good little boy—so smug and pious—that I dread going back to the corrupt and naughty world yet a bit. I feel I only

want just a little time for my wings to grow. So don't spoil an angel for a penn'orth of tar. Give me a chance to become a cherub, that's a dear girl. What do you say to a turn as far as the cliff at Shippus? I'm not sure that I shan't be able to fly by the time we get there. Don't stand in the way of my flying, please."

Pam stood swinging the empty basket against her skirts, with a hungry look towards Shippus and a lingering duty-pull towards Ullbrig. Inwardly, ah! if he'd only known how she was dying to accept this invitation without demur.

"I don't know . . . I should like," she admitted, and asked: "What time is it, please?"

"Ah, what a girl for strict time it is, to be sure," the Spawer made answer banteringly, pulling out his watch. "Always one, two, three, four; one, two, three, four. But strict time's not always music, piccola mia, don't forget that. And music's like life, no good at all without a little 'tempo rubato.' Five o'clock, dear child—and there's a green fly on your chin." He stooped forward, put his lips towards it, and puffed it lightly away. What a pretty chin it was, seen so near to, and how almost like kissing it it had seemed—though not quite. Ah, not quite. (What would she have said if he had, now?) "There," he exclaimed, as the green fly floated out into space, ". . . excuse my taking the liberty of blowing, but I wasn't sure of my touch. I didn't want to defile your

He took possession of the basket again, that she released into his hands as token of submission to his will.

"You won't . . . lose the cover cloth, though, will you?" she besought him, when he showed a tendency to swing it too freely.

"I'll stuff it in my pocket," he promised her, suiting action to his words. "And then I shall be sure to have it safe with me at Cliff Wrangham when you want it."

Then slowly and happily they retraced their steps towards the sea.

Being a Tuesday, and harvest-time to boot—the sacred Sunday feeling of silence covered Shippus too beneath its beneficent mantle. Moreover, week-days are the only Sabbaths that this place ever knows. As soon as the church bells of Ullbrig announce to the landlady of the Royal Arms (which is four-fifths of Shippus, as everybody knows) the hour of divine service, she throws open the dingy business door, and listens for the welcome rumble of the first brake-load of travellers who have driven out the thirteen odd miles from Hunmouth to be supplied with the drink that would be denied them (by the devout act of a Protestant and religious Government) at their own door. There is nothing at all royal about the Royal Arms except the name. It is disclosed with the remaining few cottages of Shippus at a quick turn of the road—an irregular, dirty-washed building—presenting, apparently, nothing but back doors. Indeed, there is no front entrance at all, that I know of. Weather-beaten mineral-water placards hanging askew from nails in the wall distinguish it as a house of liquid refreshment, but there is nothing hospitable to the outer look in its dingy back premises. A bare wooden bench, with the rough colour-wash of the wall for back, offers itself with no needless waste of civility to such visitors as feel the need of a little rest in this bleak angle of the building—scorching under the sun, and cutting to the wind. There are more backless benches on the cliff top, with broken lemonade bottles lying under them and plum-stones (the remains of such as have not been swallowed or thrown over the cliff) and apple cores and paper bags (mostly from Hunmouth), stained with the tell-tale juices of what fruits have filled them. The seats are deeply carved with the initials of the profane. Scarcely a loafer of any eminence from Hunmouth but has perpetuated his unworthy memory here in wood at one time or other. And yet, too, there is a sort of fascination in speculating upon the carvers of these letters and

epitaphs—as Pam and the Spawer found out. Who, for instance, on the bench nearest the Royal Arms was M. A. W. (the Spawer's own initials save one), carved deep into the wood-work with some rude skill of lettering, and bearing the date 1886? Was this man (for man surely it must have been, with such a pocket-knife and such a wrist to dig and such a grim energy for destruction) alive, or was he dead? Where had he come from, or where had he gone to? Was he drunk or sober when he departed from the place of this record? And how had Fate dealt with him, the unknown carver, whom the softest and kindest eyes in the world very nearly were wondering over this day, on the same seat that he had sat on (perhaps for the last time) so many years before?

A couple of shaggy donkeys, much worn with the chafing of saddles and belabourings of the gentle Sabbath-breakers' sticks, stand in sad reverie some little distance away, with their noses together, looking like down-trodden door-mats. All the shape seems beaten out of them, and they carry their great, clumsy, beautiful shame-faced heads with a pitiable resignation of despair. One human being, at least, they are not afraid of, and that is Pam. When they see her they draw near with that painfully conscientious step of theirs, so plodding, so bowed down, so humble, so submissive, and stand by her with their noses at her skirt as though awaiting her

the table for two, with ham and eggs and anything else they think likely to tempt an invalid. And the Royal Arms, which is (or was) the austere-faced lady who looked sternly at them on their arrival through the small-paned window of what might be the scullery, as much as to inform them: "Visitors is expected to obtain refreshment at this here hotel before leaving," after suggesting that he should accompany her to the hen-run and pick his fancy, delivered the biscuits to him three at a time, while he quartered them here and there about his person, and promised tea faithfully in twenty minutes. She could also promise it in fifteen, if he liked, but not faithfully. Furthermore, she said: "Thank you, Mr. Wynne."

When they had fed the donkeys, which were, Pam said, to be restricted to six biscuits apiece, as she was frightened that more might make them ill—just as though they weren't accustomed to a diet of glass bottles and plum-stones and apple-cores and pork-pie bags—they sauntered towards the cliff edge, and the donkeys followed them.

Then Pam turned upon them, and said:

"Oh, donkeys, you mustn't! You mustn't really."

And of course they didn't—so long as Pam didn't. But when Pam did again so did they, and when Pam didn't they didn't, but stood with their noses to the hard, bald ground as though they weren't asking anything, or expecting anything—having been taught the futility of that long ago—but were leaving it all to Pam's sense of goodness and mercy. And Pam couldn't find in her heart to dismiss them without a biscuit apiece to soften the dismissal. Similarly they got another biscuit apiece further on. And a few yards further the last couple of biscuits left Pam's hand on a corresponding errand of mercy. After that, of course, since there were none now to give, none could be given, but Pam promised them something after tea, and they accepted the promise sadly, with little apparent belief in its fulfilment—like beings whose faith in human nature has been irretrievably shattered. On another backless bench, close by the cliff edge, Pam and the Spawer sat together in blessed community of spirit, and solaced their souls in the blue sea before them. The sun, sinking behind their backs, cast their two shadows far out on to the sands below, above the black silhouette of the cliff. Right out to sea, on the straight, blue line of the horizon, a ship stood up in snowy purity, like an iceberg. Over one corner of the sky a smudge, as though a finger

dipped in soot had drawn it across the azure, broad at its base, thinned away to where it joined itself by a fine thread to the funnel of a distant steamer. The chalk cliffs of Farnborough rose up above the water in white marble, and the little alabaster finger of the lighthouse showed clear, like a tiny belemnite. Down the coast the black mast of the *Queen of Sheba*, its broken shrouds hanging motionless, stood aslant out of the sea as though it were the wrecked frame of an umbrella. Glints of whiteness, scintillating against the deep ultramarine of the summer sky, showed where seagulls caught the sun upon the waving wing. Bees, borne lazily by, as though too somnolent to check themselves, hummed over the cliff. Some, scenting the confines of abundance and the briny danger of the sea, flung themselves into the rankness of the cliff side, and hauling themselves up over the coarse grass blades, crawled back to the surface once more, raised their bodies aloft with a lethargic drone and hummed inland again. Butterflies and great, awkward daddy-long-legs made a constant procession before them as they sat.

And after they had spent their twenty minutes in contemplation of the scene and wandered to and fro a little along the trampled margin of the cliff, they retrace their steps and make their way into the tea-room of the Royal Arms.

It is a long, low-ceilinged room, that promises little in the

nothing of my friends Brahms and Beethoven—to say nothing of Chopin. Later on I must certainly introduce you. It wouldn't be fair to them to leave you unacquainted when such a fine opportunity offers."

But for the present they take their places at the end of the crocodile table, where a cloth has been spread, with a pewter tea-pot stand; a glass bowl of some very azure and crystallised lumps of sugar; a dried seed-cake, set out on a tri-coloured tissue paper d'oyley; some treacly marmalade; some butter; and a meagre miscellany of cheese-cakes. Ah, how different from Pam's cooking and Pam's management, all these—and yet, under the circumstances, quite enjoyable too, as a sort of super-exalted jest. An under-sized girl in a full-sized apron, who tilts the end of a big tray at such an angle upward, in front of her, to sustain it at all, that she appears, on approach, to be walking on her knees, ministers to their needs—or if she doesn't do that, brings them all they are ever likely to get, whether they need it or not. She gives Pam an oppressed greeting, for Pam knows her and she knows Pam, but her eye is mainly occupied with the Spawer. She is visibly impressed with his importance, but the impression, like all else about the Royal Arms, does not run to superfluous courtesy. When he addresses a remark to her that she has not heard, she tilts up her chin, sideways on, and screwing her lips to inquiry says: "Eh?" or "M'm?" When he asks for a knife she demands: "En't ye got one?" and when he removes his elbow to look, sees for herself he hasn't, and tells him, "Ah thought ah'd setten two," as though that explained everything. The Spawer thanks her liberally for all she does for them, but never once can he succeed in forcing a "Thank you" from her in return.

But it's all very jolly and entertaining. Pam pours out the tea.

"Sugar and cream mine for me, dear girl," the Spawer bids her, "while I tackle the ham."

"How many do you take?" Pam asks him.

"As many as you like to give me," the Spawer tells her. "I promise I won't complain."

"I'll give you one and a bit, then," Pam says. "Then you can come again if you like."

"How good of you," says the Spawer.

And altogether they are very happy indeed. They eat part of their ham and eggs with dreadful deadly Bengal metal forks, and cut them with leaden-looking knives, bone-hafted,

that are warranted "Real Sheffield Steel," without compromising any particular maker by name.

And they urge each other to fresh helpings of the dried seed-cake, that probably began its public career last Bank Holiday; and partake of the fly-blown cheese-cakes, so great is their exaltation. At times too, those necessary words are almost upon the Spawer's lips. The moment seems propitious. Only let him swallow this mouthful, and he will tell her . . . he will say to her:

"Dear girl . . ."

Then the Dear Girl smiles, or the Dear Girl turns her head, or the Dear Girl forestalls his words with words infinitely more desirable, or catches his eye, and sends it back with as guilty a feeling as though he were a top-storey lodger trying to sneak down the staircase for a bucket of coal, and intercepted with his nose at the door and the bucket in his hand.

CHAPTER XXXV

AND meanwhile, as he removed himself more completely from the girl by resolve, they came closer to each other in spirit. At the piano against the window, looking out upon a poultry-run and the profile of three meagre swing-boats, the Spawer sat down and made music, and the music—even from this cracked, tin-plate, pot-house piano—seemed to sum up all the goodness, all the charity, all the kindness, all the happiness of the day; give it a pure and hallowed expression, as the night's thanksgiving prayer gives blessed articulation to the hidden processes of the soul. It was a mantle, this music that the Spawer made, enfolded about them both. Their two lives, at this moment, were silver streams of content, that met in melodious estuary, and flowed henceforth with one broad current towards the infinite.

Ah! Dangerous state of exaltation this, when souls seem severed from the body, and feel no clog of their fleshy burthens binding them to sordid earth. When spirits are so emancipated from the material that a breath can almost blow them; when life seems to have lost all root in worldly soil, but is merely the blessed sweet odour, hovering above the blossom of existence. While the Spawer played the sky deepened. It seemed to descend like a beneficent angel from heaven and clasp the swing-boats in a celestial embrace, so that they slumbered with the deep peace that comes from above. Pallid harvest stars opened places for themselves in the curtain of blue dusk and peeped down upon the scene, talking among themselves of the progress of the harvest, of the grain that had been laid, of the sheaves that had been bound. Night threw down her lawny veil of mist, that wound the world dreamily in its filmy folds and hid the realities of existence. The life of toil and labour, the life of matter and the life of fact—these lives were no more, they were merged in a delightful life of dreams. To think was to do. Activity was merely a beautiful unfolding of the soul, delivered of all gross physical exertion, like the expansion of a cloud or the dreamy convolution of a puff of white steam. Pam and the Spawer were no longer

flesh and blood; they were the disembodied souls of themselves. They were their own thoughts, disencumbered of the flesh, merged delightfully into each other, and moving by volition amid a world of dreams. Everything that lay about them was symbolised into sublime moral truths, into doctrines of love and charity. All the world, all their doings, were dreams.

They dreamed they left the piano and bought more tea-biscuits at six a penny, and wandered forth (without any consciousness of legs) to redeem their promise to the donkeys. After much wandering, they dreamed they found them and fed them. Divine symbolism of love. And the girl dreamed she kissed their noses and said many good-byes. Kissed the donkeys' noses? Did she really kiss *their* noses? Or were these kisses, cashed upon the donkeys' noses, but the kisses of love and happiness drawn upon the bank of universal love about them, and paid into the treasury of their joint content? And she wound her soft dream arms about the donkeys' necks. But in this nebulous state of bliss, where all thoughts, all actions, all love, and all happiness seemed shared in common, and indivisible, like the particles of gases that shift and move and change their relative positions, but do not alter their substantial bulk, it might have been that her dream arms were wound about the Spawer's dream neck. They dreamed their



together and watched the moon push its red rim, like the edge of a new penny, above the misty horizon. And they watched it turn to gilt as it rose and threw aside its veil of mist, and mount up at last like a beautiful goddess with a fair white body. They dreamed themselves back to the old bench once more, at the head of the zigzag steps, cut in the face of the cliff for descent to the beach.

"Let us sit down here a bit," the Spawer said; and they dreamed they seated themselves.

The eye of Farnborough looked out searchingly for the bench, and found it at last, with this twain on it, and said "Aha!" and winked itself out again. In the growing light of the moon the girl's silvery face shone forth from the shimmering mist like a planet. Was he going to tell her here what he had to say? . . .

Or was he going to wind his arms about her and kiss her, kiss her, kiss her? Would she resent? or would she melt into his embrace like a drop of water in strong wine? Ah, torture of temptation. St. Anthony scarce suffered by comparison with this. The moon, the sea, the vastness of the night, the stars, the winding mist, the exaltation—rising up like fumes from their communion of this day—were all commingled in his soul, making his emotions infinite. He was a poor weak mortal, suffering the Olympian passion of a god. One moment his arms were almost about her—though he never stirred. The next he was holding up his purpose like a burning crucifix before his passion's eyes . . . and all the while the girl sat with her face to the moon, and he with his face sideways upon hers.

Then the prolonged silence woke the girl to a sense of something impending—that sense, so fine and subtle in her sex, that tells it, by one quick touch, as of an antenna, what man must exercise all the processes of his reason to discover.

"Shall we . . . be going back?" she suggested, part rising, with a tentative hand upon the seat, for she felt the silence as the dangerous filaments of a web that was being woven about her for some sort of captivity.

"Oh . . . if you are tired of this . . ." he responded.

"I am not tired of it," she said.

"Let's stay a little longer, then," he proposed. "Shall we?"

"If you like . . ." the girl said.

The submissive rustle of her sinking back sounded like a sigh. They were very dreamy the two of them.

And again the temptation of St. Anthony commenced. What devils were struggling for possession of him? Why was he delaying matters? Every moment threw the girl more upon his hands. He had only to drop his voice, to whisper, to put out his dream arms, to enfold her, to stifle her lips under dream kisses. . . . And with what object this?

Ah!

Love is no analyst; does not profess to be; does not want to be. Pure love and love unworthy are one and the same at the crisis. Whether the flame is the flame of an evil incendiary or the spontaneous flame of pure affinity . . . it is all one when it burns. She was there; there by his side. There to be taken . . . or there to be left. Should he take her? Should he leave her? And while he temporised thus with the devils before ceding the keys of his inner soul . . . the girl was on her feet again.

"Perhaps we ought to be going . . . don't you think?"

Fool that he was. The moment was by again. This was no time for his arm.

"Plainly . . . you are in a hurry to be rid of me." His laugh was infectiously frank and free. "Am I such poor company?"

"It's growing late," the girl said, evading the dangerous quicksand of his question. "I'm afraid . . . they'll be wondering what's got me at home."

was so completely detached from the real Spawer's body that no physical manifestation took place. The dream-Spawer, floating to and fro above the small, pitiful, carnal presentment, like a balloon in oscillation, wound dream arms about the girl, pressed dream kisses upon her lips, felt her own dream arms wind celestially about his neck; suffocated all remorse, all scruples, all purpose, all resolution, beneath kisses soft and seductive as the roseate clouds of a July sunset . . . but there was no contact with the earthly Spawer. All this the vast dream-Spawer did, but the small earthly Spawer beneath stood still and looked at the sea.

And a little later the searching eye from Farnborough, stealing a sly glimpse at the second seat, said a sudden "Hello!" and gazed in unconcealed, wide-open surprise "H'm!" it reflected, in a tone of considerable disappointment. "So they've gone at last. Sorry I couldn't see the end of that business. Wonder where they are now."

But it had other little episodes to keep its eye upon—Merensea, Farnborough, and even Spathorpe way—and could not afford to waste time in useless regrets.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE crisis was over, but the danger of relapse remained. The dream had not been broken, it had merely been prolonged. Slowly or suddenly, the awakening was bound to come. Every step of the homeward road that they took was unwinding their dream like a skein of worsted. And now, incredulous as it may seem, with the homeward end in view, the Spawer recommenced to apply himself, by a kind of feverish rote, to the preparation of the task that he had been so ready to cast down.

They passed the group of cottages where—ages and ages ago, one blazing August afternoon—they had called to visit a dying man. He would be dead now. The Spawer had troubled his last moments with a hymn-tune on a cacophonous harmonium that emitted a discordant clamour like a flock of geese in full prayer; and the girl had read him a chapter out of St. Mark—or was it Matthew or Luke?—John perhaps.

they were among the shades; as though they were dead (very peacefully), and the sun would never rise upon hard realities again; but as though, from now henceforth through eternity, their souls might wander in misty moonlight.

And still they walked, and still he had not told her. Still his soul was divided in conflict between the desire to relapse himself to the dream and the necessity to meet that promissory I.O.U. of honour which he had given to himself. All the time he was practising overtures; trying phrases in his mind by which he could approach the subject casually, without allowing the girl to perceive the degraded tortuous trail over which he had been crawling to it on his moral belly all this morning, and all this afternoon and all this evening. From the thick moonlight, as they walked, other shades detached themselves of a sudden, as though they had but that moment been fashioned out of the tremulous mist, met them walking more slowly, and were absorbed into the mist again on the Shippus side behind them, like ink-spots in blotting-paper. Silent couples, walking wordless and sometimes apart, but wrapped in their own amorous atmosphere, and always with that strange, lingering communion of step, that concentration of purpose, as though a magnet were drawing them forward in slumber. And already, here and there, through the hedges and through branches of distant trees and in the moonlit sky, were gleaming the dull yellow of blind-drawn casements and the scintillating beams of naked lamps that betokened Ullbrig.

And still he had not told her.

A bat, fluttering blindly over the dusky hedgerow and steering itself erratically on its course like an uncertain cyclist, flew almost into the girl's face and wheeled off abruptly, so that she felt the waft of its wing on her cheek and gave a little cry of surprise.

"What is the matter with you, dear girl?" The Spawer turned quickly at the sound. "You haven't twisted your foot?"

"No, no." The girl held up a face of reassurance in the moonlight. "It's nothing . . . only a bat."

"And what did the naughty bat do to her to frighten her so?"

"It didn't frighten me really. I thought it was going to fly in my face. It startled me at first . . . that's all."

"It was a bad, wicked bat to fly in her face and startle her at first." He took hold of her arm. At the touch of that round, warm, live member all the blood in her body seemed

to jump to issue with his, and combine, as though one great pulsing artery fed them both. "Come along," he said lightly, striving with his voice to palliate the tremulous danger of their union. "I won't have this dear girl frightened. I will take care of her."

She made no demur, either to his words or to his touch, but came along by his side; so warm, so wonderfully alive, so spiritually silent.

"Will she trust him to take care of her?" he asked her softly. And after a moment: "Will she?" for she had not answered a word. She said "Yes" very faintly, with the faintness of happiness.

"It is a good girl," he said caressingly, ". . . and she shall be well taken care of." He pressed confidence into that supple trunk of arm. "But she must try and be as kind to me as she can . . . now." He waited to give her the opportunity of asking him, Why? but she did not. She was in the ethereal state that takes everything for granted. "Because . . . well . . . because she didn't believe me this afternoon. She thought I was only telling tarradiddles. Now didn't she? But it wasn't tarradiddles at all, at all. It was something far worse than tarradiddles."

He felt the sudden thrill of awakening alarm run through her; but still she said no word, asked no questions, left everything

She did not speak, but seemed, in the moonlight, to be looking at him as though she were trying to absorb his meaning, to see if there were any other sense below the surface of his words.

"Are you really . . . going?" she asked him, after a while.

The intentness of her look and the wondrous depth of her great eyes—stirred now to troubled speculation—sent his purpose reeling aslant again.

"Ah!" He gave her arm a protesting squeeze. "She's not going to give her sorrow away until she's quite sure there's genuine necessity for it. She's a very wise and very cautious little woman. She wants good security for any small advances of commiseration. If I didn't know for certain that her name was what it is . . . I should be inclined to think they called her Rachel or Leah or Abigail or Zipporah—with something of Benjamin or Isaacs or Ishmael about it. Never mind. I will trust her with my gold watch, and she shall give me what she likes on it. Yes, little Israelite . . . it was the truth that this unfortunate Gentile spoke this afternoon. He knows it was . . . because he doesn't speak it so often but that he can tell the taste. He's been loafing about happily for a long time . . . but the eternal policeman Destiny has given him the office to move on, and it seems he'll have to move. It's no use getting cross with the law. Is she sorry for him now, this little Usurer?"

"But you're not going away . . . at once?" she asked him, in a startled voice.

"My gracious! What an out-and-out extortioner she is," the Spawer exclaimed, with an assumption of admiring tribute. "She won't advance me a cent of sympathy until she knows the term of the loan. If I say I'm going at once, she'll give me a better price of pity than if the advance is to drag on over an indefinite period of weeks." He made pretence to throw his chin in the air and laugh with pleasure. "Honestly, little Rebecca," he told her, looking down once more, "I don't want to humbug a penny more out of you than you think you ought to give. At present I can't say when I go . . . whether I have to go to-morrow, the day after, the day after that . . . or next week even. It all depends on a letter. I'm a condemned man, under indefinite reprieve." He paused for a moment, balancing whether he should say the next thing on his mind. "As a matter of fact, little woman. . . ." He turned his face towards her with the engaging air of candour that seemingly could not deny itself. ". . . It's no use trying to

stuff you. You're too sharp to take a dummy watch with the works out, or a gilt sixpence. So . . . as it's not a bit of good trying to be anything else . . . I'll be frank with you. I'll tell you a secret. It's a big one—all about myself. Do you think you can keep a secret?"

"I'll try," said the girl, with her eyes fixed apprehensively on his lips.

"Well, then . . ." he said. "I'm in your hands. I'm going to do a very silly thing."

Did a tremor of apprehensive pain, like the very ghost of a shiver, run up the arm that he held? or was it his own mind, that through a feeling of sympathy sought to attribute its knowledge to hers?

"You'll think me a frightful ass, no doubt, when I tell you what it is. Can you guess?"

The girl seemed to concentrate her look upon him, but whether the true answer had flashed across her mind, or whether the flash of divination merely served to dazzle her and make her ignorance still darker, so that she looked for enlightenment from him, he could not tell; but she said "No," and gave up his riddle with a shake of the head.

"I wish you'd guessed," he said. "It throws it all on to my shoulders. Now I shall have to hoist the confession up like my own portmanteau, and perhaps look a bigger ass than ever

little emotional touches with which she could illuminate the simplest saying to poetry. Her voice, soft though it was, and so full of sympathetic interest, yet struck him with a painful feeling of matter-of-fact. He and his marriage seemed suddenly stuck up in hard, unpoetic affirmation, like the tin price-shield in a pork-pie. The subtlety of artistic suggestion was altogether lacking, all the romance was gone. The thing he had wished delicately hinting at, a mysterious romantic melody for *celli con sordini*, to suit the orchestra of the evening and of their mood, was become a commonplace tune for a drunken cornet to play outside a public-house door on Saturday night. All at once he began to feel that the coverlet of dreams was fast slipping away from him. The moonlight was clearer: the hedges harder in outline. In spite of the hand that lay on the girl's arm, as though to retain that part of the dream at any rate, they were no longer spiritually united. There was an intangible, invisible, impalpable something between them as keen as the sword of flame at the Gate of the Garden of Eden. Like many another martyr before him, in his crucial hour the roseate illusions that had fortified him to his purpose were floating away from him now, and leaving him only his actual senses to realise externals and apprise him of the horrible pangs of suffering. Before, he had been temporising at the stake; trying the rope to see how its bondage felt, without allowing the cruel loops to cut into his flesh; posturing as martyr before the girl in mind only—but now he had made the girl a participant of his purpose.

And the worst of it was that he must profess that the parting meant nothing so very much to either of them. He must not insult the girl by suggesting that his going affected only her—that she would deeply feel the loss of him who felt her loss so little that he was leaving her for another. And yet! And yet!

O Lord! And yet! All his present life was but a meaningless series of disjunctive conjunctions; words of contingency and speculation; ifs, buts, supposes, peradventures, perchances, and the like.

"I say . . . you're very silent, little woman," he remarked, after a while. "Don't be hard on a fellow because he's down on his luck. You're not offended with me, are you?"

"Offended with you?" she said. "Oh, no, indeed. What should make me offended . . . with you?"

He made believe to laugh.

"Well, I don't know what should. Only . . . perhaps because you're disappointed to find that I'm just as much an

ass as any other man. Oh, music's nothing to do with it, believe me. A man may play like an angel on the piano—as I do—and yet play as giddy a goat as any on four legs, in real life, as I've done. I'm like What-you-call-him Stevens. 'I repent, Father Mostyn; I repent.' But what's done is done. I was younger in those days, perhaps. All the same, I'm not too old for a little sympathy. Say something to me, won't you?"

"I hardly know what to say," said the girl. "I was trying to think."

"Say something to give me a little courage, then," he suggested; "something to strengthen my knees a little. You don't know how white-livered and weak-kneed it makes a man feel when the marriage noose is round his neck, and he seems to hear the bell tolling, and sees the chaplain getting out his little prayer-book, and knows his hour's approaching to be launched into eternity."

Even to himself he recognised how beautifully his words were serving the purpose of concealing truth with truth. No girl on earth—certainly not the girl by his side—could have probed his utterances, in that candid voice of his, and said: "You are speaking the truth. You are going to this wedding like a weak-kneed cur, and all the time you are trying to cling to me for comfort and consolation—and yet trying not to demean yourself in my eyes by letting me know it. I am the girl you love, and you are trying to experience the pleasure of my love vicariously; by proxy, as it were. If I were in the other one's place, and she were in mine, not all the waters of the world would keep you apart from her."

No, no. His smiling, semi-serious words were like a rose-wood veneer over deal wood, and there was no penetrating them.

They were close on Hesketh's corner now. He had told her all, and he had told her nothing. Words—hundreds, thousands, millions of words were still wanting to make the parting as it should be.

And all at once he felt the power of the dream returning; the impulse to take the girl in his arms; to kiss her; to tell her that he was but jesting, and that he loved her above everything and everybody in the world; pawn all his future, with its honour and duty, for the pleasure of that one glorious avowal. How could he let her depart out of that empty leave-taking without a word, a sign, when his heart was like a vast sea, and she the spirit moving on its waters? Even as he

thought of it his fingers tightened possessively upon the girl's warm arm; his lips dropped persuasively; the words seemed to rise to his mouth as easily as bubbles to the surface of water, for the mere thinking.

"You have not said . . . you are sorry I am going yet," he told her. "Are you sorry?"

Did the girl tremble? Her face was turned away from him. Was she laughing or was she crying?

"Are you sorry?" he asked her again pleadingly, conveying by inflection what he wished her answer to be; his lips lower towards her still.

"Yes . . ."

He caught the word, but it was more like a shiver—as though all the tissues of her body had conspired to give it tremulous birth, like the whispering of a tree. Her head was still turned from him.

"Very sorry?" he pressed her. "Tell me. See; lift up your face . . ." His own face sank lower, as low as the hat brim. ". . . You are not crying?"

He released his hold of the girl's arm, slid his hand about her and drew her to him by the waist. Into that warm socket she yielded submissively, like a child into its cradle. She was his now; his in all but the asking. They were still walking, but their walk was the ghostly stepless progress of a mist moving across the meadows. The dream was back again, and the gloriousness of it. He put out his left hand, with the basket hanging from its wrist, and took the girl's soft warm chin to pull it gently towards his lips.

"Pam . . ." he said.

Out of the yellow moonlight, or out of the denser substance of the hedges, or out of the earth at their feet, was shaped suddenly the motionless figure of a man. Whether he had been there from the first, or had come there by approach, or had overtaken them, appeared not. As though he were a black pestle in an alchemist's mortar, he seemed deposed there, without movement or volition of his own. At sight of him all the dream was precipitated in sediment of actuality, that fell down to the ground in fine, imperceptible residue, like the shattered particles of a bubble. The Spawer's arm slid to his side, and they dropped apart several paces, guiltily.

"It is the schoolmaster," Pam said, awakening out of the sleep with a voice of sudden terror, under her breath. ". . . I must be going."

The Spawer commenced to hum, and craning his neck up

to the moon as though he were aware of this orb for the first time, made pleasant allusion in a clear, uncompromising voice to "A jolly fine night." The man was on Pam's side of the road. As they passed him he suddenly seemed to attract and secure the girl, as one tea-leaf attracts another in a cup. Their figures united.

"They have been looking for you," the Spawer heard him say.

"I am here," Pam answered, in her old clear voice.

The man did not move. He remained there motionless, seeming to take the words as an intimation that she would accompany him. Pam held out her hand for the basket that the Spawer was swinging with an assumption of negligence and ease.

"Thank you," she said.

The dark figure of the man embarrassed all speech. The Spawer handed the basket over into her hands without a word.

"And the serviette . . ." he said, drawing it from his pocket.

Pam received it from him and thanked him again.

Then there was a slight pause.

"Good-night!" she said.

"Good-night!"

They shook hands with a strange and ludicrous politeness. Had they been naughty children and this stranger the

CHAPTER XXXVII

Oh, reader, if you have any tears of pity to bestow upon the unfortunate, prepare them at this place, I beg you, that when the collecting-plate of compassion comes by your pew you may not be wanting. For it is all over. The blow is struck; joy and laughter are withered like blossoms cut down by the scythe; there is no more gladness in the tankard of Pam's life. Fate's rude elbow has knocked it over like the beer-mug in the harvest field, and all the blithe froth of happiness that promised so joyously, all the foam and sparkle are spilled and wasted.

It is all over. We have done with happiness. Fair-weather readers, ye that like your voyages smooth, with a blue sea and a clear sky, and a safe port in sight for your journey's end—close the covers of this book and get back to shore while yet ye may, for we are standing out now for the open waters of emotion, where squalls and darkness and rain of blinding tears shall meet us. We shall ship great seas of unhappiness and be as sick as you please. There shall be fears of founderings; dangers of collision; for the human bosom is a greater, deeper, more treacherous turbulent sea than the Atlantic; more choppy than the Channel; more stormy than the waters of a dozen Biscays.

That "Good-night" so soullessly inflected, that the girl gave to the Spawer with her tepid fingers of politeness, was to her the leave-taking of all her happiness. In joy she was an orphan. Her heart was choking her as she surrendered herself to the sombre shadow in the roadway; the black anchor that seemed to hold her fast now at the end of an iron cable. If she could have died then, in her mingled agony of shame, sorrow, mortification, and sickening despair, she would have wished it. For awhile no word was spoken. She and the gloomy figure of the man walked towards Ullbrig together, very far apart, without looking at each other, almost as though they were ignoring each other's presence. A great silent wall of division rose up between them, a barrier of disgrace, on the shady side of which walked Pam. Through all this silence

was going on a mighty struggle. The man, with throbbing neck and veins of whipcord in his forehead, was desperately striving to find his pretext to scale the barrier or break through and speak to the girl on ground of common understanding, but a sense of shame for what he had seen withheld him. Great waves of heat and cold swept him alternately. That which he had witnessed chilled him with a horrible fear for the terrors of that which he had not witnessed, and yet fired him to torrid anguish. That embrace that had struck him sickly to stone in the roadway . . . was it the beginning, or was it the end? Had the girl been playing him false all through? With the magnified doubts of his class concerning the evil magnetism of musicians and the slackness of their scruples, his heart was wrung with horrible apprehensions as to how far the Spawer possessed this power, and how far he had used it. Was this girl—whom he loved with a pure, blind, white-heat passion—was she, while scorning his approaches, so deeply infatuated with the visitor from the Cliff that she coveted rather to be the temporary toy of the one than the honoured wife of the other? The doubt stung him to the quick. He wanted to speak, yet dared not for fear his words might betray this thorny crown of his torture. Oh, what he would have given to know the history of that walk from Shippus to Ullbrig; what would he not have given to be able to wipe it out of all their lives and memories as though it had never been.

a tremble in her voice. "You may carry it, if you like," she said, and handed it to him.

"Thank you."

He took it from her with an awkward scuffle of untutored politeness. Even as he felt the pride of the possession he felt the shame and degradation of it too—begging for the crumbs that fell thus from the rich man's table. To walk by the side of her as the Spawer had done; to carry her basket as the Spawer had done; to try and delude his poor, degraded soul with these fragments of a banquet to which he had been an uninvited spectator (a guest never), and make himself believe he was in some sort enjoying her favour. Ah, poor fool! poor fool! A worshipful child, suffered to carry some beautiful woman's parasol, while the owner made love with an upgrown man over its head, was not a poorer, more pitiable, laughable fool than he. By his side walked the phantom figure of the Spawer, communing with the girl, and his miserable guard of flesh and blood was powerless to prevent it, or intercept the messages of remembrance passing between them. Ah, if he could; if he could. All his life was bound up in the girl. He had wrestled for her in body and soul. On his knees before Almighty God he had prayed for her, begging God to give her to him, to incline her heart, to soften her, to pour into her breast the grace to love him for the sake of God's only Son, Jesus Christ. Amen! Amen! Amen! He had wrenched the petition out of his heart in agony of shed blood, with his fingers driving deep into his palms, into his neck, into his cheeks. He had got out of his bed to pray for her in the sleepless night-time when she . . . had been dreaming of this visitor, perhaps. . . . And now.

"Have you been fair to me?" he asked her suddenly, in a low drenched voice. The words rushed up to his mouth on a tide of hot blood.

The girl had felt the imminence of the attack. She had been, in spirit at least, a participant of the man's agony; had felt the blood rushing up again and again with its impulsion of speech.

"What do you mean?" she asked faintly, and turned her head aside momentarily, as though to the gust of a strong wind.

"Have you been fair to me?" he asked her again.

For very fear he dared not alter these words that he had once uttered and was sure of, lest the alteration might involve him too much.

"I have not been unfair . . ." she said.

She put out the defence like an arm that almost recognises the justice of the blow aimed, and makes no real effort to ward it. He sensed the mental abandonment to his skirmish, and followed it up with a direct attack.

"You have been very unfair," he said hoarsely. "You know you have been very unfair. Even your voice betrays you." He was on the point of calling upon his eyes for corroboration of her unfairness, but he stopped himself with an effort that the girl heard and understood. "You made me a promise," he said. "One night . . . what did you promise?"

"It wasn't a promise," the girl protested. "I never promised you anything. I told you I daredn't promise . . . and I couldn't promise . . . and I didn't promise."

"It was a promise," he said again. "If it wasn't a promise . . . it was your word, and I trusted your word. You said there was no bar to my loving you. You told me . . . and you know you told me, that I might go on loving you, and try to win . . . your esteem. All this time I have been believing you and your word. . . . Are you going to tell me now that I've misjudged you?"

He spoke very rapidly and jerkily and hoarsely, as though he were himself ashamed of this necessity to put his thoughts into words and hear them.

dominion over her by the sheer conflagration of righteous anger, he dared not, lest she might admit his charges, confess herself a sinner, and own an unconquerable disregard of him. To be allied to her by an indefinite hope, frail as a silkworm's thread, was heavenly compared with the blank severance of despair. He was a retainer upon her favour, and must keep his place. What authority he held, to assume authority over her, came from her.

"You told me . . . I might love you," he said, straining his voice to breaking point in his fierce desire to hold it steady and keep its control, ". . . that there was no other bar—no other bar. Have you been making a mock of me all this time?"

"No, no." He knew the girl's two hands were together in their agony of protestation, but they both spoke with their faces unturned, each looking before them fixedly. "Believe anything of me . . . but that," she begged him. "I have never mocked you. I would never mock you."

He hesitated a moment, and then:

"Are you . . . making a mock of yourself?" he asked her.

The question shook her first like a wind, and then stilled her suddenly.

"What do you mean?" she asked him.

"Are you making a mock of yourself?"

They were at the first of the houses now, in the little high street, and there were figures moving about between them and the Post Office; figures that might stop; figures that might speak; figures that might peer into her tear-stained face when the light of some yellow window shone on it.

"I cannot go on . . . like this," she said, with a half-sob and a shiver. "I'm not fit to meet anybody. Let us turn back."

They turned back, facing the moon. For a long time no reference was made to the suspended point of the conversation. The girl walked with her white, troubled face set before her, glistening under its tears, like a second moon. The man, stealing one covert look at it, saw that no resumption of this subject was likely from her quarter. She was in the clairvoyant state of trouble that would have led her to Shippus again, unchecked, without a word.

"You say you have not made a mock of me," he took up again, in his monotonous, tightened voice, ". . . but you are making a mock of somebody. Who is it? Is it yourself?"

"Why am I making a mock of somebody?" the girl asked.

"Is it fair to yourself?" he said, and his voice grew tighter and tighter, " . . . to be taking walks down the Shippus road . . . at night . . . with a stranger? You know . . . what sort of a reputation the Shippus road has at night-time. You know what sort of company . . . you are likely to meet . . . what sort of company you have met to-night." His voice so constricted about his throat that it seemed like to strangle him. "Is it fair to yourself . . . putting me out of the question altogether . . . that you should give people . . . give them the opportunity of saying . . . saying things about you?"

The girl had no answer but the faster flow of her tears. She knew well enough that he had spoken no more than the truth. Judged from an external standpoint, she looked no better than her misguided sisters—farm wenches and hinds' lasses—that wandered to their shame by the hedgerows under the shades of night. And for this, and all her other delinquencies, and all her other sins, unhappinesses, and penances of suffering . . . she wept.

"I think too much of you . . . ever to risk bringing you within reach of people's slanders. I would rather cut my hand off . . . than that I should hear you spoken lightly of. To me . . . your character is more sacred than my own. I would guard it with my life if need be. But what is it . . . to others?" The reins of his passion slipped from

far from the truth after all; but it shocks one's cosmopolitan soul to have to subscribe to such tenets. Not because of what they contain, but because of the uncatholicity of the formula—a very stocks, indeed, for the confinement of one's belief.

"What does it matter . . . to him . . . whether he makes you food for people's tongues? All he cares about is his own pleasure and gratification. The attentions . . . of such a man . . . are an insult in themselves. He will know you down here, for his own purposes . . . will flatter you . . . will walk with you; but would he know you . . . in the towns? Would he walk with you . . . before his fine friends? No, he would not. He is treating you as though you were a rose by the roadside, to be plucked and cast away the moment he is tired of you. Your friends are not his friends. You ought to see it . . . and know it. You have no right to be associating yourself . . . with a man whose acquaintance . . . is so ambiguous. Does it matter to him that you are seen with him . . . along the Shippus lane by night? Does he care whether you are the talk of every corner and gateway? Does he ask for you honourably . . . as I do, and seek to guard your reputation by every means in his power? No, no. When your name has become a byword he will go back to his fine ladies and forget all about you."

"It is not true. You are wrong," Pam struck in tearfully, catching at the breast furthest away from him and pressing under it with her rounded hand as though to hold up her weak and trembling body, ". . . wickedly wrong. You have no right to say those things . . . and I have no right to listen to you. You think . . . because . . . because you saw us at Hesketh's corner, and we were together. . . . But you are mistaken. He met me . . . as I was going to Mr. Smethurst's, quite by accident, and went with me." The remembrance of the sick man's wish and the Spawer's goodness opened wider the sluices of her tears. "And then . . . we had tea . . . at Shippus together, and music, and stayed to watch the moon . . . and came back. It was every bit my fault. He doesn't know anything about Shippus lane . . . and I thought of it, but I daredn't tell him. How could I? He has been kinder to me than anybody else in the world—except Father Mostyn. He is a gentleman, and I know it as well as you . . . and so does he. Is a gentleman wicked because he's a gentleman? All the things he has done for me . . . he has done without ever taking advantage of his kindness by a single word.

Other men have done things for me . . . and asked me to love them or marry them at once. He has never played with my heart as you say, or tried to make love . . . or make me unhappy. He is too proud to do such things. You are wrong . . . wickedly wrong. Because . . . you love me . . . you think everybody loves me. He likes me . . . but he doesn't love me. I wish he did. Oh, I wish he did! But I'm not good enough for him . . . and I know it. There has never been any question of his loving me. He is engaged to marry somebody else . . . and he may leave Ullbrig any day. When he told me he was going . . . I was so unhappy that I began to cry. I couldn't help it. I didn't think he would notice . . . but he did . . . and tried to comfort me. And then . . . then . . . you were there and saw. And I love him," she said, almost fiercely—certainly fiercely for Pam—"I love him. I love him, and I tell you. Because he has been kind, and taught me things, and played to me. I love him in the same way I love Father Mostyn. What if he wouldn't walk with me before his friends? He has walked with me so kindly here . . . and made life so happy for me . . . that it will be like death without him. Oh, I wish I were dead now! I wish I were dead now that he's going!"

And turning aside by Lambton's gate, close on Hesketh's corner, she laid her two arms upon the top rail, and lowering

he told Pam, after he had suffered her to weep awhile without interruption. "What I have said to you," he tugged at his collar, "has been said . . . through love and for love."

The girl raised her head, wiped her eyes with the damp ball of her handkerchief, and put it away into her pocket.

"Let us go back," she said. And not another word passed between them that night.

"'Ave ye brought 'er back wi' ye?" Emma Morland called, coming to the passage end by the big clock, to inquire of the schoolmaster when they entered by the front door, and catching sight of Pam: "Goodness, lass, where 'ave ye been to all this time? We was beginnin' to think ye mud 'a gotten lost."

"I went to take Mr. Smethurst . . . his wine," Pam said.

The schoolmaster passed through into the little kitchen.

"Ay, bud ah s'd think 'e'll 'a drunken it all by this time," Emma exclaimed, with not unkindly sarcasm. She had a reputation, even well deserved, in the district of a tart tongue when occasion called for it—which it frequently did—but to Pam her asperity was something in the nature of a loving shield. She could say the hardest and flintiest utterances to Pam, and yet convey the sense of kindness through them. Her hand, indeed, was bony, but its grasp was tender. "An' 'ow did ye find t' old gentleman? No better, ah s'd think."

"No."

"Nay, 'e'll nivver be no better i' this wuld, ah doot. They gied ye yer tea, it seems."

"No-o."

"What! En't ye 'ad it, then?"

"Yes, thank you, Emma."

"Where?"

"I had it at Shippus."

"At Shippus. Well, ah nivver! Did ye gan by yersen?"

"I met Mr. Wynne."

"An' 'as 'e been wi' ye all time?"

"Yes."

"'Ave ye onnly just come back?"

". . . A little while ago."

Miss Morland's opinion was expressed by a pause.

"Come in an' get yer supper. It's all sett'n ready."

"I don't want any supper . . . thank you, Emma."

"Not want yer supper? What's amiss wi' ye?"

"Nothing. At least . . . I have a headache."

"Ye 'adn't a 'eadache when ye started."

"It's the heat. It was very hot in the sun. Where's uncle?"

"I' t' parlour."

"And aunt?"

"Ay."

"Say good-night to them both for me . . . will you, Emma?"

"What . . . are ye away to bed?"

"I think . . . I shall be better there."

"That's soon done wi' ye, onnyways."

Emma came closer and took a keen glance into the girl's eyes.

"Ye look to me as though ye'd been cryin'," she said. "'Ave ye?"

Pam pretended not to hear the question. Moreover, she was quite prepared to cry again at the slightest opportunity. Emma took her by the arm.

"You're all of a shake," she said, and held the girl under scrutiny. "Pam lass," she said, and dropped her voice to a terrible whisper; "there's nowt . . . nowt wrong wi' ye? Ye've not been gettin' into trouble?"

"Emma!"

Pam shook herself free of scrutiny with a burning face of repudiation.

"Thank goodness!" Emma said devoutly. "Bud it can 'appen soon enough to onny on ye." Emma testified freely

"Come yer ways an' let's 'ave supper," she said, with her head through the door. "Pam weean't be wi' us; she's ganned to bed. Ah telt 'er she'd better. Lass's gotten a 'eadache, plain to see, wi' trampin' about i' sun this afternoon — lookin' after other folks' comfort. Ah divn't want 'er settin' to, to side things away when we'm done. She would, for sure, if she set up. Ah'd to say good-night to ye both for 'er, she telt me."

And that same evening, during a moment of the schoolmaster's absence, the shoemaker delivered himself of a strange remark to his wife and daughter. He was struggling with the big black Book at the time.

"'Ave ye noticed . . ." he inquired, in a confidential undertone, and gazing at Emma and his wife over the thick silver rims of his spectacles, "onnything about our Pam, latelins?"

Emma Morland looked up sharply.

"What sewd there be to notice?" she asked, as though the idea were charged with the sublimated essence of the ridiculous.

"Div ye think . . . there's owt betwixt 'er 'an . . ." he jerked his thumb in the supposed direction of the absent one, "t' schoolmester?"

"Div ah think stuff and nonsense!" Emma Morland said.

"Ay, bud ah'm tellin' ye," the postmaster insisted. "Noo, mark mah wods. Ah've watched 'em a goodish bit o' late, an' ah've seed a little o' seummut when they didn't think there was onnybody to see owt."

"What 'ave ye seed wi' ye, then?" Miss Morland inquired sceptically, but with a sharp eye.

"This much," the postmaster told her. "Ah've seed 'em talkin' together a dozen times when they didn't use to talk one. Ah've knowed time when they'd set i' a room while clock ticked round al-most, an' them nivver say a wod—or they'd gan their ways oot after a while, mebbe. Watch an' see if they'll set i' a room aif a minute noo wi'oot speakin'? Ay, an' ah've seed 'im kickin' 'is 'eels about passage end for 'er, when 'e didn't think ah knowed owt about 'im, an' she's come down tiv 'im i' end. Ay, an' ah've tekt notice on 'im when she's ganned out o' room. 'E's all of a fidget to be up an' after 'er, an' get a wod wi' 'er on 'er way back. Ay, an' 'e sets up for 'er when she comes back fro' Vicarage. It'll be a rum un if 'e wants 'er—an' ah'm ready to lay 'e diz, onny time. Ah divn't know as ah could wish better for 'er, so far as my own inclinations gans. 'E'd mek 'er a good 'usband,

an' 'ave a good roof to gie 'er, bud ah'm jealous t' General 'ud 'ave to be considered. An' ah've my doots whether 'e's man to think ower much about syke (such) as schoolmesters."

"T' old 'umbug," Miss Morland ejaculated — though whether in reference to the schoolmaster or the General or his reverence the Vicar, would be a difficult point to decide.

But the subject, temporarily suspended by the entrance of the schoolmaster himself, took deep root in the family imagination—deeper root still, indeed, in the well-nourished soil of Miss Morland's common-sense, and testing the hypothesis by what she had seen of Pam's conduct to-night, and finding it in accord, she prepared herself to wait and watch events with an eye as keen as that of one of her own needles.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

Up rose the sun in the morning as though nothing had happened, and spinning over the red and thatched roofs of Ullbrig, took stock of the harvest fields, the wheat in sheaf and stook, the oats outstanding; measured the work to be done with a jocose eye as though he had said "Aha!" and rubbed his hands in anticipation of a glad time.

Into Pam's bedroom he peeped—prudently, through a corner of the white blind—and found the girl open-eyed upon her bed; thrown across it transversely in abandonment of disorder, with her moistened handkerchief clasped like a snow-ball in one hand. It had been a night of anguish and unutterable torture. She had wept, she had prayed, she had resolved, she had renounced, she had slept—at once the mere fact of sleeping had awakened her—she had tossed from pillow to pillow, turned them incessantly to find some coolness for her fevered cheek; she had risen, and watched from her window the slow arrival of day; had seen the firmament of stars sliding away in the west, like the giant glass of a cucumber frame. The doings of the day before were a delirium. In her dreams the schoolmaster, the dying man, the Spawer, Emma Morland, the tea-room at Shippus, the donkeys, the moon—were all mixed up in a horrid patchwork mantle of remembrance. The Spawer was going. There would be no more music; no more French; no more walks and talks in the morning; no more evenings at the Vicarage; no more evenings at Cliff Wrangham.

In the days when they had touched upon this final parting with the light inconsequence for a thing far distant—as people speak of death—she had entered into schemes for the continuance of all the studies that he had inaugurated. She should go to Hunmouth for piano lessons. She should have conversational French lessons *chez* M. Perron, whose brass plate and dirty windows she had seen often on her visits to Hunmouth. Ah, but that was when the Spawer had been with her. It had been bitter-sweet at times to dwell on future sadness, with the warm hand of present happiness to take hold

despair. She knew it, t
no more. The thought of him, sleepi
two of her, through a couple of frail th
mortar, filled her with horror and repu
through his cough had come to her at
one undesirable companion of her sl
being left to him. Like a shadow now l
And with the instinctive fear that he
her, in spite of all, that she would dri
for lack of anchor to hold her firm, or
shuddered tears into her pillow, and c
with tightened fingers.

For there was only one man in the
he was going. She loved him; she lo
him. She knew that she was not for him
he was above her on the ladder of life, t
her fingers, as it were, without knowing it
to cry out; that this love of hers could nev
But she loved him for all that; drove the
it into her shrinking soul with the vind
spur.

She knew now, now that he was going
that she loved him with all the love of
capable. Would he have had to plead a
the schoolmaster had pleaded? No, no,
She would have kept him waiting no longe
heart than at the door of the Post Offi
come to her and look

uttered her name and looked at her . . . there was nothing in that to cast dishonour upon the other girl. It was only that he had detected her suffering, had understood that she was weeping and unhappy at his departure . . . had put his arm about her to give her comfort, as though she'd been a little child. It was a beautiful act of tenderness and compassion . . . nothing more. Poor girl! poor girl! She was sick with the misery of love, that, not knowing whence came this sudden sorrow, multiplied causes without end; shames, ignominies, degradations. Even the scene with Emma Morland, that would have slipped away from her like water off the breast-feathers of a swan, had her heart been sound, was branded now into her remembrance with the sear of red-hot iron. Emma's look; her inquiries; the grasp of her hand; the drop of her voice; her anxious whisper—somehow, wretched girl that she was, she seemed in some fashion to have deserved them; to be guilty of some great unknown shame; to be a lost sister, sinking like sediment through the clear waters of life to its dregs, touching here and there as she descended. The day was full of terrors for her; the morning meeting with Emma and with the schoolmaster; the facing of her uncle and her aunt; their solicitude about a headache that had never been. More Ullbrig hypocrisy to wade through; more shame of lying and untruth.

From her bed she rose at length, a soulful picture of trouble; replaced the fallen pillow and drew up the blind. An echo of its sound of cord and creaking roller reached her faintly from elsewhere, with a muffled cough, and telling her that her own activity was being duplicated by the ever-vigilant shadow, struck pain across her mouth. The slide window was already part open, but she flung it to its extreme width, and resting her hands upon the white-painted sill, put out her head with red lips parted, and tried to air her bosom of its close, suffocating atmosphere of trouble that she had been breathing and rebreathing all through the hours of this night. Down below, under a thin attenuated mist, lay the little patch-work kitchen garden of potatoes and onions and peas and kidney beans, and the dingy vegetable-marrow frame, like a crazy quilt. And beyond that, away to her left, rolled out the fields in the face of the sun to Cliff Wrangham . . . where he was. From her place she could distinguish the misty shadow, like a frost picture on a pane, that proclaimed Dixon's. How often, in the days that were gone, had she opened this casement and looked just so across the fields,

and said to herself: "Will there be any letters for him this morning? . . . and shall I see him?" But now she looked across and said: "I dare not see him. God send there may be no letter this morning." All the world looked strange to her. It seemed that her eyes, like the eyes of an infant, were not yet trained to correct the images formed upon her retina.

Poor girl! poor girl! She had been so happy once. So very happy with her six shillings a week, and no desires beyond the desire to be at peace with her neighbours and return good for evil.

At last she lighted her little oil stove, that had once been the supreme of her ambition throughout a month's saving, and set her can of bath-water to boil. Every morning she made the complete ablution of her body . . . and in summer sometimes twice. In this respect, at least, there was nothing of the Ullbrig hypocrite about her. As Father Mostyn told the Spawer, and more than once, for Pam was a subject to his liking:

"Ha! different class; different class altogether. No mistaking it. You can trust her inside and out. Doesn't dress herself first and then put a polish on her face with a piece of soapy flannel, taking care to rub the lather well in. Ha! that's our Ullbrig way. Leave the neck for Sunday, and rub the soap well in.

"But, thank Heaven, that's not Pam's way. Can't mistake it.

and in place of diaphanous draperies the steam from the hot water rolled and curled and licked about her lovingly as she poured it into the bath, and tried it with finger-tips of no indecision—but she was Psyche for all that. Her body was as sleek and supple as the picture Psyche; her flesh, where the sun had not browned it, was as white as alabaster and as sound as a young apple; her limbs as shapely as any that Leighton's brush could have given her. When she stood up, with her firm, round bosom thrown out, and dipping the big Turkey sponge into the wash-basin of cold water, pressed it to her with both hands as though she were hugging the desire of her heart, while the water slid down her snowy torso, tinged with warm glow of pink now, like marble, and ran, still clinging about her limbs and body, to her feet; and dipped again, and again pressed, and again and still again, till the water at her service was exhausted, she was the best, most beautiful type of English girl; unforced in growth, but developed gradually in pure air and pure thought; not one member of her corporeal republic in advance of the other, or of herself; all of them, indeed, reserved in their development rather than in advance of it, but awaiting only the ripening. The beautiful picture of a girl on the threshold of womanhood, and waiting in all chastity to be called, without any indecorous rush to be in advance of the summons. Ah, girls, girls, girls! Always anxious to be women. Do not struggle so inordinately to be ripe for the market. Do you think man is such a poor judge that he does not know the merits of green fruit, or so witless that he does not know the dangers of the ripe? Keep your thoughts and bodies green, like oranges for shipment, for indeed you are perishable fruit.

The stimulus of the bath restored to some extent the freshness of the girl's mind, and gave to her sorrow a cleanly, less bedraggled emotion. From her eyes she swilled away all traces of the night's tears. Thank Heaven, she renovated very easily; a porcelain girl could not have ceded the dust of trouble more completely. She showed no redness about the lashes; no swelling of the lids; no dark hollows above the cheek-bone. Her flesh had not sickened in the least. A little press of the finger-tip on its plumpness, and lo! it sprang back alive and responsive, like a cushion, with a little pink blush at the salutation; it did not respond with doughy sluggishness. Her lips had lost none of their fire of ruby; they had not consumed at all to grey ash; there was no dryness to show how great the flame had been, no withering like the dried leaf of a rose.

Moist and elastic they looked as ever; the beautiful downward pull about their corners—as though an invisible Cupid were trying hard to bend this bow of his—might be more divinely accentuated, but that would only be to an acute observer who, holding the secret of the girl's sorrow as we do, searched keenly upon her face for the outward signs of it. Her cheeks were still as smooth and creaseless as ivory; her brow like a tablet on which nothing evil could ever be written. The same old Pam she looked and seemed to everybody but herself. Ah, if only one's mind would wash like one's body—what blissful sinners we could be.

And with the strangely awakened desire for cleanliness, the feverish thirst of a mind to counteract by outward purity its inward contamination, the desire even to change all the old garments of yesterday's turpitude, to invest herself in a new atmosphere, to give herself a new mind and a new body and a new environment, if she might, she drew on her legs black cotton-silk stockings of the sort she wore on Sundays; buckled them with the best pretty blue silk garters of her own making (Emma had a pair like these too), clad herself in linen of snowy white, unfolded from her neat store in drawer and cupboard; and hid all this dazzling envelopment under a pretty pale print frock that could have stood up of its own cleanliness—cool and fresh and rigid as an iceberg. And

of skies and dawn; the postmaster, with his genial, honest face of shrewd stupidity, brown as snuff and wrinkled like morocco leather, who cut bread with his knife and thumb and shoved it home with the haft, making a pouch of one cheek while he talked out of a corner of the other; who stirred his cup with the noise of a grindstone, and looped his thumb round his spoon while he drank to prevent its slipping down his throat. Mrs. Morland, with her relaxed face of maternal good-nature, like a well-buttered muffin, who looked as though she lacked the energy for long-sustained anger, which, in truth, she did. The vigilant Emma, sitting bolt-upright, as a sort of human cruet, vinegary and peppery—whose acidulated conversation almost lent the zest of pickles to the meal. And last of all the schoolmaster, feeding ruminatively—not to say furtively—into his plate as though it were a book he pored over. When he masticated there were muscles that worked in his temples and imparted an air of grave, cerebral activity. His cough troubled him this morning, having, as Pam could have explained, been practising all the night, and his face bore the haggard evidences of sleeplessness.

No word of allusion to last night's matter passed between these two, but the constrained silence of each towards the other was like a finger laid inexorably upon this page of their past. He was present when the postmaster inquired of Pam about her headache, but recorded no expression of sympathy. Perhaps Pam's crimson blush deterred him; but he lingered, brushing his hat in the passage before departing for school, and when Pam happened to make a journey into the front parlour he interposed himself by the door against her return. Pam finding him there, still brushing his hat as though he were an automatic hair-brusher, stopped in the doorway coming out, and stood before him without speaking—not angrily or resentfully or reproachfully—but decidedly with the unhappiness of awakened remembrance upon her downcast face and trembling lip.

"I only wanted . . ." he began, in a low voice, almost inaudible, ". . . to tell you. Last night I — I said things to you . . . that perhaps I oughtn't to have said. I can't remember now exactly what I did say, but I'm . . . I'm very sorry I said anything."

Pam told him it didn't matter the least bit. He wasn't, please, to trouble.

"I did it for the best," he explained, ". . . at the time."

Pam said . . . she was sure he did. He wasn't, please, to think about it. It appeared, however, the only thing he was capable of thinking about. He seemed to have a difficulty in tearing himself away from it; brushing his hat the while. It is fortunate school started when it did, or he would have worn all the remaining nap off.

"Will you please try . . . and forget what I said to you . . . and forgive me?"

Pam said . . . she had forgotten already. A shade crossed over his face to think that she should so soon have forgotten words that had been so vital to him at the time, but the forgiveness that accompanied it relieved the momentary disquietude.

"I hope . . ." he suggested — and in the pauses he brushed his hat fiercely — ". . . that it will make . . . no difference to us. I hope we shall be . . . as we . . . as we were before."

Pam hoped so too, an invalid hope that walked slowly, and touched the walls of silence for support as it went.

"Noo," said the postmaster triumphantly, in the clean little kitchen, holding up a hand to enjoin attention, and jerking his thumb violently in the direction of the parlour door, whence the brushing of the hat and the low murmur of voices could plainly be heard. "What did ah tell ye? There

CHAPTER XXXIX

HALF an hour later the mail cart rattled up before the two-fold Governmental door over the big round cobbles, and the fiery figure of James Maskill, red and shining like a new-boiled lobster, fresh from his sun-bath, invaded the Post Office, blowing the sweat off his mouth on to the floor in a fierce "Bf-f-f!" with a shake of the head, and slammed the letter-bag on to the counter in a strenuous but not aggressive greeting.

"Noo," he said to the postmaster, mopping his face at him with a red handkerchief, and "Noo," again to Pam, mopping the inside of his cap. "Mah wod! Bud it's gannin' to be warm to-day, before it's done."

"Will you have a drink, James?" Pam asked him.

At the sight of that ominous bag, so full of deadly inertness and possibility, her heart had thumped her like a stone in a box. Yes or no; yes or no; yes or no?

"What of?" James asked her straightway.

"Of . . . of . . . what would you like?"

"Nay . . . 'appen ah'm best wi'oot," James decided, a great mantle of modesty falling over him at this suggestion of choice.

"Not if you want one, you're not," Pam said.

Her fingers were burning, and her heart was dreading the opening of the bag. Was there? Wasn't there? Was there? Wasn't there? She put her hand to her side again. James only thought she slackened the grip of her belt.

"Ah could do wi' un," he admitted reluctantly, "so far as that gans."

"Milk . . . would you like?" Pam suggested.

"Nay . . . ah mun't mix 'em," he declared oracularly, and licked his parched lips with a smack of apprehension.

"Mix what?" Pam asked.

"Ah've 'ad one . . . o' t' road," he explained. "Bud 'appen yon barril's thruff by noo. She wor drawin' a bit thick last time ye asked me."

"Ye're best wi'oot, Jaames Maskill," came the voice of

Emma Morland, from the interior of the Post Office, ". . . at this time o' mornin'."

"Ay, ah think ah'm, mebbe," said the postman, plunging hands into his pockets and screwing up his mouth for a broken-hearted whistle.

"Gie 'im a glass o' lemonade," said the voice again. "'E can 'ave that an' welcome."

"Will you have a glass of lemonade?" asked Pam.

"Ay, ah'm willin', if it suits ye," the postman acknowledged.

A hand appeared at the inner door holding a lemonade bottle and a thick tumbler (the latter looking as though it had once held marmalade in Fussitter's window), and a second hand, when Pam had possessed herself of these, held forth a boxwood lemonade opener.

The postman drew down the effervescing liquid thirstily into his profounds, with his red chin mounting up step by step as though it were going upstairs, and a great fizzling sound from within as if he were a red-hot man, and let the glass rest on inverted end upon his lips for a space, to make sure it had yielded its last drop, and set it down on the counter with a great breathed "Ah!" of appreciation, holding his mouth open while the sparkles needled his inside.

"Noo let's away," he said, ". . . or we s'll be 'avin old Tankard prawtestin' us to Gooviment agen."

He said this because Pam had already opened the bag and

but before these two onlookers her fingers went on regularly as clockwork.

Right, left. Right, right, right.

Left, left.

Right. . . .

Left. . . .

James Maskill, watching her, thought she hesitated there for an almost inappreciable moment, as though she had detected her fingers in blundering, and expected to see her transfer the letter from her own pile to his. But she had not blundered. No, no; she had not blundered. The distribution of the envelopes went on again apace, as though she were dealing hands from Fate's pack. Left, right; left, right; left, left, left. She allotted the last letter, and pushed James Maskill's budget towards him across the counter with a heroic smile, enough to make his eyes water. It was the smile such as a dying martyr might bequeath to those she loved, and by whom she had been loved. All was death and the coldness of it underneath, but at times like these death, coming from within, drives out the soul from its earthly tenement, and as it lingers on the threshold of the flesh before departing, the flesh is glorified. Many smiles had Pam given the postman in his time . . . but this one clung to him. It seemed to him—so far as anything seemed to him—that she might almost love him. That smile accompanied James Maskill throughout his morning's round. Ullbrig, looking beneath its blinds and through its muslin curtains, and out of the cool, gauze-protected windows of its dairies at the toiling figure of the postman—hot, perspiring, and dusty—could have little imagined that he was the carnal receptacle of a smile; that he held Pam's last look enclosed in his secretive body as though it had been the precious pearl and he the rugged oyster. But so it was. He scarcely noticed the shining of the outer sun, to such extent did the internal brightness light him.

And meanwhile, while James Maskill fed his heart upon that one smile and thought what a treasury of bliss it would mean to possess the possessor of it, the possessor walked along, a miserable bankrupt of happiness. Scarcely another smile remained to her. She had given him that one, but it was about her very last. Under the broad brown strap of her letter-bag she strode, with her lips locked and her soul as far away from her eyes as though the body were a house in the hands of the bailiffs; the key elsewhere; the occupants dispersed. For all the sun beat upon the red poppies in her

hat till the straw cracked again and planted burning kisses on her neck, she was almost cold, from her feet in their black cotton-silk stockings upward. Once or twice even, she could have shivered for a thought. And the burden of the bag! Strange that one letter should make such a difference.

All about her the harvest was in full swing; the reapers whirring from seen and unseen quarters like the chirruping of grasshoppers. The morning's mist was quite absorbed; the scene was as clear and detailed as one of those coloured Swiss photographs, with a blue sky, showing perhaps here and there a little buoyant white cloud floating cool and motionless in it, like ice in wine. Towards Garthston way the moving sails of the self-binder beat the air above the hedges. Half-a-dozen fields distant a pair of red braces, crossed over a calico shirt, struck out clear and distinct as though the whole formed a banner. Now and again she heard "Helloes," and looking, saw remote figures hailing her through their trumpeted hands. When she raised her own hand in response they made semaphores with the twisted bands of straw or shook rakes in the blue air. It was not many harvest fields that would have liked Pam to pass along the road without noticing them. From their side of the picture they saw the scarlet poppies dancing lightheartedly on their errand, and took the friendly uplifting of the girl's arm for token of the smile they never doubted would be there. If they could but have seen the smile of

. . . be witness while he read it even; hear him tell her definitely that he must go . . . that all was over! Oh, no, no, no! It was too much for her to sustain And she didn't want to break down before him again. She didn't want to degrade herself in his sight. It was one thing to shed tears at a sudden intelligence . . . but it was another to be always shedding them. If she showed tears again . . . he would suspect her. Had he been another girl she could have wept her weep out upon his shoulder. That was admissible between girls. But because he was a man . . . she could not weep. There were no friendships possible between men and women; it was love or nothing. She must just let her heart break—if only it would—in silence and solitude.

All in thinking upon her trouble, her step, accommodating itself spontaneously to the mental retardation of her progress, grew slower and slower. The nearer she came to Cliff Wrangham, the more time she needed to prepare herself. If possible she must try and slip round through the Dixons' paddock, cut across the stackgarth, and leave the letter with one of the twins—if only she could come upon them—without being seen. They would be sure to be somewhere about. Then she tested her stratagem by all sorts of contingencies. Suppose Miss Bates came upon her instead, and asked her to wait . . . for any letters in return. Suppose . . . he was out in the lane . . . waiting anxiously for the very letter she so feared delivering. She might leave it at Stamway's, and ask Stamway's if they'd let Arthur drop across the fields with it . . . as she was in a hurry to get back. And she would give Arthur a penny.

And now her step was slowed almost to a standstill. George Middleway even could have run her down. All the activity was up above; there was none left for her legs. Already she was past the half-way house in the little elbow of road before you get first sight of Stamway's. It is a part enclosed; except from the immediate fields, which were untenanted, she couldn't be seen here in the pursuit of wasting Government time. The next turn would bring her into sight again; she would be under the eyes of Stamway's; Dixon's would be able to follow her progress henceforward, all but a yard here or a yard there, to the paddock stile. Before she came into public view again . . . she ought to think; she ought to make sure. And one cannot think, standing erect in the roadway like a scarecrow. It looks suspicious, even to the suspicious eye of self—that at these

times suspects everything. Instinctively she drew into the shelter of a hospitable gateway. There, at least, she could profess for her own satisfaction that she had succumbed to the midday lassitude; was listening to the music of the reapers, with her arm over the rail and her foot on one of the lower bars.

Was the past a dream? . . or the present? Had the Spawer ever been? . . or was he ever going? Which was easier to realise? The joyousness of then or the misery of now? Should she wake up to discover that all her unhappiness was a nightmare, that there was no question of the Spawer's going, no dread of a letter? She dipped her hand, almost unconsciously, into the bag to see if, perchance, the whole affair was an unsubstantial fabric of fancy.

Ah, no! No fancy; no fancy. She had not wakened yet. There were the two letters at the bottom of the bag; the one for Stamway, the other . . . it came out with her hand. She had not wilfully drawn it, but it seemed to cling to her fingers. Oh yes, how well she knew its motley of stamps and postmarks; how well the superscription in that familiar feminine hand. She held it before her eyes, and gazed at the writing as though she would have wrested the invisible scribe out of it; called up the astral body of the girl who, in these shapely lines, and all innocently and unknowingly, had dealt her happiness such an irreparable blow. Who was she? Where did she live?

All at once her dormant consciousness awoke with a start to his imminence, as though her eye had been giving no warning of his approach all this while. She turned round, and a great spreading sickness of guilt took hold of her. Her blood seemed rushing all ways, like an ant-hill in confusion. The hand with the letter dropped suddenly, as though it were a wounded wing. It was the right hand that held it now, and the bag was on her left side. Had he seen her? Could she pass it into the bag without notice. He was horribly near . . . and looking at her. Her heart pitched downward like a foundering vessel into the trough of her fear.

Into the pocket at the back of her her guilty hand crept, trembling and craven, and lay there, in its thief's refuge, burning unbearably like the firebrand of her infamy.

CHAPTER XL

THAT grand old hoary-headed humbug, Father Time, quack doctor of souls, compounder of boluses and soothing balsams and unguents and electuaries for the physicking of poor sickly human nature, who had been in such futile attendance upon the girl and the schoolmaster throughout the feverish hours of this past night, had had yet another patient up by the sea-coast suffering from symptoms not dissimilar; had given him the same salves; the same nostrums; applied the same burning poultices to his conscience; nightly through had given him the same medicaments to swallow; nauseating blue pills, designed to purge the soul of its impurities; had leeched him with memories; had opened the veins of contrition and closed them again; had felt the fevered hurry of his pulse; had remarked the coating on his moral tongue; had squilled and sennad and sickened him till his conscience was wrung out like a wet sheet, and the soul of him could read the dial of rectitude about as clearly as a new-born infant can tell the minutes by the clock.

boxed his ears, kicked him with the ignominious toe of silence, and watched him while he slunk home to hide his head? Pam had seemed obviously in awe of him. She had said: " . . . It is the schoolmaster. I must be going." And she had left him, even though the previous moment had seemed to make her altogether his.

Who the devil, pray, was the schoolmaster? and what the devil had he got to do with him (the Spawer)? and why hadn't he (the Spawer) gone up to him the (schoolmaster) and asked him what he meant by standing in the road without moving, and doing nothing and saying nothing? By Gad! there had been moments on his way to Cliff Wrangham when he had been of a mind to turn back and come swiftly upon the fellow and tax him, saying:

"Look here, you;" or "I say you;" or "you there . . . I want a word with you."

But because he could not quite decide what word he wanted, he had walked on.

And all the old cross-examination of this morning began over again, with the additional perplexities of everything that had happened since then.

Was he prepared to marry this girl? Remember, it was a post-girl. Say the words, very slowly, over to himself, A POST-GIRL. Put them, for instance (to appreciate their capacity better), into the lips of somebody who did not count among his warmest admirers. Let So-and-So say them. Imagine the intelligence. "Say, you chappies, heard about Wynne? What do you think? Gone and thrown himself away over a post-girl. Picked her up at some God-forsaken hole by the sea, and married her. Now they've started a poultry-run and take in washing. Can you imagine the fellow's making such an awful ass of himself! A barmaid's bad enough . . . but, good Gad! . . a post-girl. Without a penny."

Then he thought of the girl as he knew her. How could he leave her to her rounds with the letter-bag; to the hopelessness of existence in Ullbrig; to her contact with postmen and Board School masters and rustics; to be made love to by uncouth yokels, and persecuted with undesirable attentions of the Hunmouth riff-raff. Who was there in the whole world worthy to possess her but himself?

There was nobody—nobody.

What other man could aspire to the girl without degrading her by the mere fact of his love?

There was none.

There would be no dog-in-the-manger policy here. He could not marry the first and make a vestal virgin of the second—a sort of filleted maiden to minister to the sacred fire of his love. Once he renounced her she was Destiny's child again. He had no guiding hand in her guardianship. All the world might aspire to her.

Ah, well; love was stronger than he. He bowed to love. He took her. He took her.

Unreservedly?

Unreservedly.

In spite of everything?

In spite of everything.

He had counted the cost?

Many times.

Sit down, then. Here. Pen, paper, and ink. Blotting-paper on the piano top. Now write. August the so-and-so . . .

Write? What the deuce! He was in no mood to write. Write what and why and where? -

Write to the other one?

Certainly, as follows: "DEAR BEATRICE,—It's all over between us. I've tried hard to hang on, and carry the thing through, but I've funked it at last. I'm going to marry a post-girl. She is a lady, the daughter of General Sir Somebody, V.C. Be a bit sorry for me. You yourself needn't regret anything;

can keep me. Only let me know whereabouts you are now, and I'll come across to you for protection from my own infirmity of mind, by the first boat. If I am to be a brute, for my sins, it must be towards the second one. Are you at Zürich, Vevey, Zug, Luzern . . . or Berne?"

Was that the letter?

There would be no letter.

What would there be, then?

A departure.

Was he going?

He was going.

He went as far as bed that night, and until daybreak writhed between sheets of burning copper. The sun that he had left yesterday evening at Shippus came round upon him again at the bedroom window, and winked unpleasantly with knowing, wicked laughter. "Tell you, old chappie," he told him, "you've got 'em badly. Say . . . how long were you out there last night after I'd gone? Sorry I couldn't stay. Asked my friend the lighthouse this morning—just caught him for a moment before he went off—but he said he couldn't keep his eye on you. Oh, all right, if you've got the hump, stick to it. A little rain would do you good and cheer you up some. Think you're the only sick man in existence, don't you! You ought to have my post and do a little travelling. That'd cure your insularity."

As soon as the Spawer had bolted the pretence of his breakfast he set himself to the piano, mainly to stave off all inquiry and conversation from the household, but it hurt him almost as much as external words. He played so ferociously that Miss Bates, though she banged the tea-tray like a timbrel in her impassioned attempts to attract his attention, and kicked all the castors of the table, and rattled the cups and saucers against his ear, couldn't make the slightest effect upon the stubborn rigidity of his neck.

"There's none so deaf as them 'at weean't 'ear," she observed angrily, on departing. "Ah know very well ye mud 'a 'eard yon last un, when ah kicked tray wi' my foot."

But industriously the Spawer struggled on—banging, hammering, fighting. He would thrash the instrument black and blue, but he would keep at it until the post had been and gone. On that point his mind was made up. He would not look on Pam's face again until he was actually for departure, passing through Ullbrig on his way to catch the train at Button Dene. What was the time now? Half-past

nine. The post would be about in. She would be slinging the bag over her shoulder shortly.

And what if she would? On again like a dog with a tin can tied to its tail.

Ah, stiff work! What was the time now?

A quarter to ten. Only that? He had thought it half-past at least. On again, but less noisily, with his ear cocked over his shoulder. (His arms were evidently growing tired.) Sickening work this butchering of the keyboard. What was the time now? Ten o'clock. Ten o'clock! About her time. On again . . . more lightly than ever; æolian arpeggi wafted up and down the keyboard.

Hark! Was that a gate?

! ! ! !

Blood, hot and surging. Heart playing the big drum. Ears opening and shutting like cymbals. Mouth dry.

Was it a gate! There, it slammed. It was She. She was going through to Barclay's. Just one look . . . he must not miss her. He was up as though a giant had lugged him by both ears.

Lewis!

Damn the kid! What right had he to play with the gate for sheer devilry, racking people's nerves? No penny for him to-day, anyhow. He didn't know that he had ever intended

Wrangham this morning. It was . . . too hot for letters. Certainly she would not be there.

Should he walk quickly or slowly?

He should try and not make a fool of himself. Walk as though he were going somewhere, of course, and meant getting there. He must turn his head about from side to side to give the impression of a man enraptured with the beautiful scene, to the exclusion of all else.

But that might appear as though . . . he were looking for somebody.

Looking for somebody! Whom should he be looking for? All the same . . . to be sure . . . stare right in front of him, then.

But that appeared even worse. It looked as though he'd got his eyes fixed down the road in absolute expectation of somebody.

Where the deuce was he to look, then? He couldn't put his eyes in his pocket. Look downwards. Let him walk in meditation. (Not too slowly there.) As though he were thinking out some musical masterpiece, and oblivious to externals.

What was that? . . that white thing over there? . . by that tree?

Silly ass! He must not jerk his head up in that idiotic fashion. Anybody with half a grain of sense would read the meaning of it. It was nothing but a stone gate-post.

And all suddenly, at a turn of the road, in a spot where he had never expected her, she was there; he was upon her at last. Upon her so suddenly that at the first realisation his heart gasped in shock like a live fish jerked on to the river-bank. Had he really been hoping for her? He couldn't have been. The sight of her turned his mouth to dust; he had nothing to swallow. If he could have wished himself back at the keyboard again he would have wished it without hesitation. But he was here by his own blundering folly, and must make the best of it.

And he drove his reluctant legs forward, wretched beasts of burden, that moved shakily and staggered against each other (it seemed to him) like worn-out barge horses, making their last tottering journey to the fellmonger's yard.

CHAPTER XLI

THE hot sunlight about the Post Office was savoury with the smell of Yorkshire pudding—you might have almost imagined that it was the house itself a-cooking—when Pam returned, beneath the sling of the empty letter-bag.

On other mornings she would take her way in through the two-fold Governmental door; announce her arrival in musical pleasantry to the postmaster in his little shoemakery; hang up the flabby letter-bag on its peg behind the counter; pop in upon Emma Morland, if she were at work in the trying-on room, to commend her diligence or express surprise at the amount of the work achieved, or ask in what way she could be of assistance; give a look into the little clean kitchen to feel the pulse of the oven, and proffer herself for some kind service to her aunt-by-courtesy, as red as boiled beet-root, and fitting her clothes as tightly as if she'd been a bladder set before the hot grate. But this morning the girl made no parade of arrival. She drew nearer to the house by the

the flesh—and in truth she looked but the phantom of her former self—but the ghost of the girl that had gone out this morning. All the colour was struck out of her blanched cheeks as though a hand had smitten them white, and no blood returned to reproach the blow. Her eyes were fixed in front of her whichever way she walked; it seemed something horrible had been stamped upon them and set over them for seal. Her lips were hard and rigid; wax-work lips, artifically coloured, upon a wax-work mouth. It looked as if such a mouth could never open in speech; it was a mould, a cast, struck off the face of grief. Slowly, but very surely, the old Pam was being squeezed out of her bodily habitation. As a house in the hands of new tenantry loses its old outward characteristics and takes on new features of blinds and curtains and window-palms, so this body of Pam's in the hands of its new possessor was beginning gradually to display evidences of the invisible occupant that, hidden behind its walls, wrung fingers and wept, and spent its moments in the torturing austerities of self-examination and penance.

. . . Once in her bedroom, the hardness fell off the girl's face as though it had been stucco; the hidden occupant came to her trembling lips, looked out of her eyes, gazed forth upon the outer world, as an escaped prisoner might, full of horror of his position, and dreading every moment the summons that should announce his discovery. But there were no tears this time. Tears are but the petty cash of woman's trouble account; the noisy silver and copper, which make a great jingle, are parted with and never missed. Pam's trouble was no longer in silver and copper, not in gold even. It was in silent bank-notes. All the tears in the world could not liquidate such a liability. One might as well attempt to compound with a handful of irate creditors out of the loose coin at the bottom of one's pocket. Besides, it was not sorrow now, it was horror. In trouble women weep; but in horror they stare with open eyes, for fear the thing dreaded may come upon them when they are unaware. So children, who rain tears at a dog by day, will lie abed silent at night, with their great, dry eyes fixed upon the darkness, and fear to cry or close them. Tears, scalding tears, were all about the hot lashes of the girl's eyes; but into her eyes themselves they did not enter. Like a thief she had stolen round her own door; like a thief she pressed it to, with a hand over its sneck, and shot the little catch under the lock; like a thief she listened—she, who had feared nothing

before but herself and her own conscience, feared everything now.

The big grandfather's clock downstairs went "Br-r-r-r-r!" It was a way he had; he meant nothing by it; but it sent the girl's hand to her bosom this morning as though she had heard in the sound the announcement of her whereabouts to the world at large. Now she strained her ears for the sounds of feet, the calling of her own name, the approach of pursuers . . . but there came none. Only down below were audible the muffled intermittent click-click-click of Emma's industrious machine; the tapping of the shoemaker's hammer; the sound of the little kitchen poker thrust energetically through the bars of the grate to rouse the sleepy fire to its duty by Mrs. Morland; the clash of saucepan lids and the jangle of a pail. Satisfied that her entrance had been unobserved, and that the clock's warning had been in vain, she unslung the post-bag from her shoulder and hung it over the foot of the bed; removed her hat of red poppies, and laid it on the chest of drawers.

What had she come for? For a moment even she herself seemed scarcely to know, standing by the bedside with dangling head as though she had been some wild driven creature fleeing for refuge, of which now, in possession, she knew not to make what use. Then as she stood, her right hand crept round to the back of her, found the entrance to

outlined the supple firmness of her figure with something of gusto in the task. In abandonment there seemed no bones in it; it was supple as a salmon; as lissom as a wand of green lance-wood. Backward or forward, this way, that way, it looked as though you might have bent it and broken nothing—not even its heart. Her ankles, dear indices to a fascinating volume, so sleek and tight and flexible, lost nothing by their encasement in black cotton-silk; into the little soft leather Sunday shoes her feet fitted like a hand into a glove; press your thumb and finger anywhere and the leather would gently resist you. Poor little shoes, that had walked so happily in their time, how very still and lifeless they lay now, side by side on the white counterpane, with their soles still fresh and lemon-coloured, turned pathetically towards the foot-rail. This burden at least is too heavy for you, little patient strugglers. And little arms that had swung so blithely; how resistless you are now. Many lovers have sought to be enfolded within them in their time, but you have repulsed them all. Now is come a lover whom you cannot repulse. They shall clasp him, unresisting, and he shall enter them. Shame is your lover. He has been in your waking dreams all this night past, seen dimly and distorted. Now you have him face to face. Lie still in his arms and be mute before the hot caress of his kisses. Your Gingers and your James Maskills, your doctors, your parsons, your schoolmasters, your Jevons, and your Steggisons have sought you in the flesh, but this lover has found you through the spirit. Now that the spirit is surrendered the flesh lies prone enough.

Poor beautiful flesh. Even Shame's kisses cannot corrupt the beauty of it. In this moment of its weakness and surrender, if the Spawer could but be witness of you, it is probable (only you do not know it) that your defeat would gain you the victory. For the weakness of a woman is her strength, and to see beauty so overthrown, by a lover less relenting than himself, rouses a man's best instincts of honour and protecting chivalry.

But the Spawer is three good miles away, and cannot enter damsels' bedrooms as the sun does. Perhaps, as human nature is constituted, it is well. If you cried on him he could not hear you, and with that label of your guilt between your fingers, though you knew he could hear you, you dared not cry.

Poor child! poor child! So young, so beautiful, and so wicked! So dreadfully, horribly wicked!

To say that she thought would be to convey a wrong

impression of her state. Thought, like her eyes, was wide open, but it did not think—any more than her eyes saw. It stared—stared fixedly, without blinking, at the consciousness of her great wickedness.

Dreadful images passed over the darkened curtain of life, like the pictures of a magic-lantern.

In Sproutgreen a poor girl had taken some clothes that did not belong to her. Only a bodice (very much worn), an old skirt, a vest or two (she was badly off for vests), and some stockings. She had not meant to take them, she said . . . but all the same she had taken them, and they had sent her to prison.

That picture showed on Pam's screen too.

She had not meant to take it. No, no; but she had taken it. Why shouldn't she be sent to prison? Why should the one poor girl be made to suffer and she go free?

A man in Hunmouth had stolen a leg of mutton from a butcher's shop when the butcher's back was all but turned. If he'd only waited a moment longer or set off a moment sooner all would have been well. But his wife was starving and he was in a hurry. He wanted the mutton . . . it was noble of him to risk himself for a dying wife. But the law recognises no nobility in theft, and sent him to prison.

That picture showed on Pam's mind too.

She wasn't starving; there was no excuse for her case of

pillow, the man gazed with the vacant stare of a harmless idiot over Dixon's first gate. If his state had been hopeless before, he told himself, it seemed doubly hopeless now.

To be sentimental by moonlight was one thing, but for a man ostensibly in the marriage-bespoke department to manœuvre a wide-awake girl into the laneways of emotion was a very different thing indeed. All their yesterday's sentimentalism was so much trade discount knocked off their relations; he was at cost price now, and something under. The whole time of their interview this morning she was unmistakably trying to shake him off; had been inventing urgent reasons why she must be getting back; hadn't a word to say for herself beyond transparent excuses to get away; couldn't say what she was going to be doing this afternoon; couldn't say what she was going to be doing to-night; couldn't say whether she should see him to-morrow; couldn't say, apparently, whether she'd ever see him again; had almost torn herself away from him in the end. What was he to think? What was he to say? What was he to do?

He was a sick man now, and no mistake. His very internals tormented him, as though he were a storm-tossed, drifting ship, and he saw land and the girl receding from him hopelessly on the horizon. How to reach her? How to get back to her? How still to save himself?

Alas, during these moments of wounded love and pride, for the Other One!

CHAPTER XLII

In one swift headlong descent of crime Pam had suddenly arrived at the awful pitch of robbing Her Majesty's mail.

She had vague terrorised notions of the penal code and the shameful penalty of her crime, but her horror for what the world would inflict upon her, to ease its conscience of the various offences it commits itself, was exceeded by the horror with which self regarded self. And she had horror, too, of the unutterable horror that would prevail in this house, so still and peaceful at present, supposing her crime were brought home to her and exposed. She saw the awe-struck face of the postmaster, sitting with his mouth open and empty of words under the incredible calamity of her shame; she saw Emma Morland looking at her, part in anger, part in unbelief, part in compassion; she saw James Maskill obstinately refusing to meet her eye, and pretending to whistle in shocked abstraction; she saw her one act extended and dramatised to

The sound of it sent a shudder through her to the soles of her lemon-coloured shoes.

"Pam. . . ." It was Emma Morland's voice that called her. "Pam! Are ye there?"

Instinctively she clutched the tell-tale letter in her hand and scrambled off the bed. Her first thought was for the little dressing-table. She pulled up the looking-glass (ah, that was no liar); rubbed her cheeks with her hands to try and soften their haggardness; smoothed her hair rapidly; shook out her skirts, and passed on trembling legs to the door. Her name met her a second time as she opened it, from a few steps further up the stairs, and more urgently uttered.

"Pam! . . . Are ye there?"

Her mouth was dry; her lips felt cracked like crust, her tongue a piece of red flannel, but her voice might have been less unsteady—as it might also have been louder—when she answered.

"I'm here," she said, and with an effort to divert suspicion and appear unconcerned; ". . . do you want me, Emma?"

A guilty person would never ask: "Do you want me?" A guilty person would know too well, and not dare to risk the question. Don't you understand? Cunning, you see, was coming to her help—now that she was enlisted in the devil's own army. When the crime is once committed, when we have taken the infernal shilling and the devil is sure of us, he does not stint his soldiers with the armament of craft.

"Didn't ye 'ear me callin' of ye?" Miss Morland inquired, with some sharpness of reproof at having been kept at the occupation.

". . . I can't have done," said Pam. ". . . Have you been calling long?"

"Ah've been callin' loud enough, onny road," Miss Morland protested. "What's gotten ye upstairs?"

Pam's fingers tightened their hold of the letter in her pocket.

". . . I've been . . ."—she cast a beseeching look around the room for inspiration; the devil furnished her at once—"washing myself."

"Goodness wi' ye! En't ye washed yessen once this mornin'?"

"I've been . . . having another. It's so hot outside."

"Ye mud be a mucky un bi t' way ye stan' i' need o' soap an' watter. Ye do nowt else, ah think. Come down wi' ye noo an' set dinner things, will ye? It's about time."

Only that! Not detection; not discovery and shame. Only to lay the dinner things. And she had been paying for that moment with all the horror and heart-burning and trembling of knees for the real shame itself. What prodigality of terror! What an outrageous price to pay for a mere worthless alarm!

Now it seemed to her her body was turned to glass. Every thought within her she felt must be visible through its transparent covering, as though she had been but a shop-window for the display of her delinquencies. Down at the bottom of her pocket, smothered beneath her handkerchief, and her hand most frequently over that, lay the object of her crime. She dared not turn her back for long lest they should see it through her clothing. If it had been buried under the red flags of the kitchen their eyes would have been drawn to it and found it. They had lynx eyes, of a sudden, all of them. They pricked her through and through with strange test-glances, as though they were trying the flesh of a pigeon with a fork. When she put her hand to her pocket to reassure herself, at some horrid suspicion, that the letter was still there . . . their eyes taxed the action and charged her at once, seeming to say: "Ah! . . what's that? Did something crinkle?"

Even the handkerchief, in which she had placed her trust to hold down and shake the evidence of her guilt, presently

him, thrusting the letter into the pocket at the back of her, with a face like a flaming scarlet poppy, and a breast rising and falling, as though he had been seeking to wrest the missive from her. As for Emma Morland, accustomed as she was growing to novel demonstrations of the girl's character, this present act so eclipsed all previous records, and ran so counter to everything that experience had ever taught her of Pam, that she gasped in audible amazement. The schoolmaster, on his side, awkwardly placed—as one whose undesired services seem to savour of meddlesomeness—flushed up to the high roots of his hair, and then slowly, very, very slowly, commenced to whiten all over till his face, his lips, his neck even seemed turned, like Lot's wife, into salt.

If Pam had but allowed him to return her the letter, it is quite probable that he might have had the good feeling to raise it from the floor and hand it to her with his eyes upon hers, as a guarantee of good faith. On the other hand, it was equally probable that he might not. In any case, the risk would have been truly a heavy one to run. But now, though Pam had saved herself from open detection, it was only at the cost of a suspicion that henceforth would keep its wide eye upon her every action. Love is a terrible detective; it has no conscience; knows no more than a criminal to discern between right and wrong. Everything that it does it does for love. The things done are nothing. The thing done for is all. Back into Pam's pocket went the accursed germ of crime and misery which she must hug so closely—though she would have given her unhappy soul to be rid of it.

But there was no safety in her pocket now; all her confidence in a personal possession fled from her. Her hand seemed sewn into her dress, by its anxiety to keep assured of the letter's safety. For everything that she did with her right hand she did half a dozen with her left.

And even that tried to betray her.

"What 'a ye done at yersen?" Miss Morland asked her tartly, when she saw her collecting the glasses lamely off the table with the left hand, and the other one missing. ". . . 'A ye cutten yer finger?"

"No. . . ."

Pam jerked it quickly into use and showed desperate activity with it. Also, she cast a fearful look over her elbow, lest she should see the condemnatory square of white lying on the floor at the back of her, blinking maliciously at her discomposure. The letter seemed, in her imagination, suddenly instinct with

the diabolical desire to work her ruin. She could no longer trust it about her. Up to her room she betook herself at the first favourable opportunity—which was the first that Emma'a back happened to be turned. In the low, long drawer of the wardrobe, deep beneath confidential articles of personal attirement, she buried it in the furthermost corner, as far as arm could reach. Then she squeezed the drawer to again noiselessly, and standing back, applied her gaze in terrible assiduity to see whether the wardrobe showed any outward and visible signs of having been tampered with for improper purposes. There was nothing suspicious that she could discover. The knobs spun wickedly, and winked at her in devilish confraternity:

"Aha, not a word. Trust us. We know; we know!"

The afternoon drew on with a humming and a droning, and a buzzing and a whirring, and a tick-tacking and a hammering, all mixed up sleepily together in thick sunlight, like the flies in Fussitter's golden syrup. The postmaster slept on his little bench in the shoemakery, with his head back against the wall, and his mouth open like the letter-box outside, and Ginger Gatheredge's left boot between his knees, sole upward, and a hammer in one hand and the other thrown out empty —with the sort of mute, supplicating gesture towards the inexorable that one associates with rent-day. Mrs. Morland had slipped out to Mrs. Fussitter's and would be back in a

less—deeper, indeed—but it was the love for a beautiful and treacherous syren. His love was as unworthy as he believed hers to be. He knew not to what extent she would practise her deadly deceptions, and in holding himself prepared for any, his mind outstepped them all. He opened a book—it was a volume of Batty's hymns—and laid it on the table to be ready as an excuse, should any be needed. And there he sat, with the flat of his face strained towards the kitchen beyond, where he heard the girl astir.

For a while, so far as Pam was concerned, in her solitary occupancy of the kitchen, she was free from actual alarms. Only her mind troubled her; asking her how she was going to repair this great wrong that she had done—for she had no wilful intention of retaining the letter. All her mind was concentrated upon the hazy means of its safe delivery. All her fears were lest shame of discovery should fall upon her before she could make redress. And these fears were not groundless. The task of redress seemed more difficult as she looked at it. In the first place, the letter bore the date of its Hunmouth stamping conspicuously on its face. Had the Ullbrig office had the stamping of its own letters, how easy it would have been to re-stamp over the old postmark. But coming and going, all the letters were stamped in Hunmouth. Oh, why hadn't Government trusted them with the stamping of their own? So much better it would have been—so much better. Yet since there was no possibility of altering the tell-tale postmark, what was to be done? If she took the letter as it was . . . he might remark the date, remember having come upon her when she was reading something, remember having seen her put something hurriedly into her pocket, remember her confusion when he asked whether there was any letter for him . . . piece it all together and learn that she'd robbed him.

And till he got this letter . . . he would stay at Cliff Wrangham.

And there might be other things in it besides.

Money, for instance. Notes that She wanted him to put into the bank for her. That made Pam feel very ill. Notes—bank-notes! Those would mean transportation . . . or something, for life, wouldn't they? The kitchen felt of a sudden so small and hot and cell-like that she could bear it no longer. She slipped out feverishly into the garden. There, among the potatoes and cabbages she made a turn or two, but it was such an unusual thing for her to do, and she was so

afraid lest its strangeness might set other eyes to industry concerning her altered state, that the fear that had driven her out drove her in again. Back she came from under the burning sun into the stewpot of a kitchen. And there, all at once, she heard a horrible sound from overhead that stunned her intelligence like a cruel box on the ears. The next moment she was racing up the little twisted staircase with the horrid stealth and the concentrated purpose of a tigress. To her bedroom she fled on swift, noiseless feet; couched by the door for a moment to make sure, and prepare her spring, and pounced in terrible silence upon the curved figure of the postmaster's daughter, on her knees by the fatal drawer of the wardrobe.

CHAPTER XLIII

"WHAT are you doing there?" she panted breathlessly.

"Lawks, lass." The figure of Miss Morland sprang upward like a startled Jack-in-the-box and caught at the open drawer to prevent an overbalancement on to her back. "What a start ye gied me, comin' in on a body like that. Y' ought to 'ad more sense. Ah thought ye wor far enough."

"You have . . . no right here," Pam said, desperately trying to justify her entrance. "This is my room. You have no right in my room. What are you doing in that drawer? You ought to have . . . asked my permission."

For a moment Miss Morland's face was a kaleidoscope of conflicting emotions. Her mind apparently was in such rapid progress that her words couldn't descend, like passengers at the door of a railway carriage, until the train had sufficiently slowed up.

"Oh, mah wod!" she ejaculated, rising to her feet at length in rare display of dudgeon, and wiping the unworthy lint of Pam's carpet off her knees as though it were contamination. "Things is come tiv a pretty state when ah've to ask ye whether ye've ganned an' putten mah red petticawt i' your drawer by mistake. Mah wod, they 'ave an' all. Ye mud think a body wanted to rob ye. What's come tiv ye?"

Even now, with that fatal drawer thrown open, and the signs of rummaging visible about the surface, Pam dared not retreat from her standpoint. (Oh, my Heaven! it wasn't her standpoint at all. She hadn't made it. Hadn't wished it. Up till now Emma had had the run of this room unchallenged. But Pam was but a poor, unresisting tool in the hands of her terror.) She daredn't give Emma permission to continue the search. She daredn't say she was sorry. She daredn't abate one jot or tittle of her loathsome simulated indignation. She couldn't breathe until that drawer was safely shut.

"If you had asked me . . ." she began.

"Ah don't want to ask ye nowt," Miss Morland said contemptuously. "Ye tell me nowt bud lies."

Pam's lip quivered with fear and reproach. How much

did Emma suspect? How much did she know? How much had she seen?

"You have no right . . . to say that, I think, Emma," she protested.

It was less a protest than a tremulous feeler, to sound the depths of Emma's knowledge. But she quaked for results.

"No, ah en't," Miss Morland acquiesced, with the terrible force of agreement that means so much dissent. "Ah s'd think ye was just comin' upstairs to get yersen washed again, when ye dropped o' me."

"I will look for the petticoat . . . if you wish," Pam offered humbly. "But I don't think it's here. Which one did you say it was, Emma?"

"Ah didn't say it was onny un," Miss Morland declared, repudiating the olive branch. "Ah don't want ye to look for owt. Ah'll do wit'oot petticawt sin' ah'm not fit to be trusted. Ay, an' ye needn't trust me. Ah don't trust you. Ah know very well ye're agate o' seummut ye'd for shame to be fun' (found) out in. Where's watter ye washed i' this mornin' before dinner? An' 'oo's been liggin' (lying) o' t' bed? Cat, ah s'd think. Folks isn't blind if ye think they are. . . . Noo, get yersen washed agen. Ah'm about tired o' ye."

At which Miss Morland slammed to the drawer peremptorily with her knee, and flounced past Pam in a fine show of injured

the letter was there; there (relief and reawakened misery) flat as she had laid it.

But this incident had shaken Pam's nerve. Her faith in the room was shattered, and in agony of spirit she cast her eyes about on all sides of her to decide where now she could best deposit this horrid possession. Thoughts of sewing it into a little flannel band and wearing it across her breast occurred to her. But all sorts of dreadful things might happen. She might fall; she might faint; some sudden accident might overtake her; she might drop down dead even, or dying; willing hands might tear open her dress-body and exhume this frightful secret from its shallow grave. To such an extent did she foresee disaster of this sort, that the mere wearing of the letter seemed a courting of it. It was like shaking her fist in the face of Providence.

And then of a sudden she bethought herself. In the front parlour downstairs was a little inlaid brass and mother-of-pearl writing-desk that Father Mostyn had given her. Once she had made regular use of it for such small writing as she had, but now never. It had become elevated from an article of use to an article of household adornment; one of those penates—ornamental fetiches, with which all rustic parlours abound. To open it almost was an act of profanity, except for Pam. Pam had one or two little treasures of a personal nature that she was guarding zealously, and the household law could be stretched a point to allow her a sight of these possessions from time to time, so long as she did not abuse the privilege. True, there was no key—but then, respect of sacred tradition was as good as any key. Nobody had ever looked into the desk but Pam since its sanctification. Why should they look now? Down to the front parlour she worked her way, disguising the directness of her journey with the cunningest side errands, doublings and confusings of her tracks.

It was but the work of a moment to open the desk, but quick as she was about it the door of the second kitchen, that led out into the passage, opened in the meanwhile, and she heard the schoolmaster emerge. There was no time to dwell upon the details of the letter's concealment. Between the two leaves of the desk she thrust it, pushed the desk back into its place, reinstated the china shepherdess on its polished top, and picking up the crystal letter-weight, with the vivid picture of Southport in colours beneath its great magnifying eye, engrossed herself in the examination of this—her scarlet

neck and burning ears turned resolutely towards the doorway.

For some moments, standing silent, a statue of guilt surprised, with her heart turning somersaults inside her and her voice miles away had it been called upon—she almost believed that the schoolmaster had entered the parlour. It seemed she was conscious of his presence advancing behind her; could feel his eyes boring through and through her like live coal. So tense was her feeling, and so imperative the summons of that unseen gaze, that in sheer self-defence she was constrained to lay down the letter-weight and turn round quaveringly to meet her accuser.

But there was none to meet. The room was empty of any but herself. For all she knew, the whole circumstance—from the opening of the kitchen door to the schoolmaster's entrance—was a mere fabrication of her tortured nerves. And now she would have liked to bring forth the desk anew and do her hiding over again more thoroughly, but she dared not, lest she might be disturbed in real fact. Minutes she waited there, with her hand on her bosom, listening for the selection of a moment that should seem propitious. "Now," she kept urging herself; and "now," "now," "now!"

But whenever she extended an arm some warning voice within her cried: "Wait . . . what was that?" At times it was but the creaking of her own corset: the straining of her

Morland came bustling back from Fussitter's and said, "Good gracious! yon clock's nivver right." Not that she doubted for a moment that it was, but as a kind of reproof to Time for having slipped away from her this afternoon, and got home so much in advance of her.

And Emma Morland emerged from her trying-on room, and came into the little clean kitchen, apparently searching for something, and resolutely keeping her gaze clear of Pam. Pam knew at once what she wanted. It was not anything that eye could see or hands could lay hold of; not pins or petticoats or needles or darning thread. It was counsel and advice, locked up so securely in Pam's own delinquent body, and because of her conduct this afternoon, the girl for very shame and contrition dared not offer to give it. She besought Emma's eye with a pathetic, supplicating look to be asked some favour, however slight, by which she might hope to work back her slow way into Emma's good graces, but that eye knew its business to a hair's-breadth, and went doggedly about it without stumbling into the least collision.

Last of all:

"Do you . . . want me, Emma?" Pam asked, in an almost inaudible voice of sorrow and repentance.

"Eh?" said Emma sharply, turning as though she had not rightly heard, and could not imagine what possible subject should lead Pam to address her. "Did ye say owt?"

"Do you want me, Emma?" Pam begged again humbly.

She would have liked to throw herself at Emma's feet and pluck the hem of Emma's skirt, and cling there till Emma poured upon her the benedictory grace of forgiveness.

"What sewd ah want ye for?" Emma asked incomprehendingly. "Naw; ah can do wi'oot ye, thanks."

No; she could do without her, thanks. She, who had been so glad to have Pam's help and assistance in the past; who had never done a stitch on her own account without discussing it first with Pam, and whom Pam had always loved to help, could do without Pam now. Pam was no longer necessary to her; was no longer worthy to render assistance. No longer, for very shame, would she be able to enter Emma's little trying-on room, and know the happiness of helping; no longer be able to enter Emma's own heart and talk with her as to a sister.

It was all ended. The lights of life were dropping out one by one like the lights of Hunmouth when you drive away from it along the roadway by night. Into the great darkness of

shame she was journeying; it seemed all the old landmarks were being left behind her. In a strange land she would soon find herself. She was on its borders now—but a twist of the road, and her old life would be for ever lost to her.

And then suddenly a vivid flash of resolution shot out and pierced her darkness with golden purpose, like a shaft of sunlight into the dense heart of a thicket. Why should she go on suffering like this? Why should she go on bearing her shameful burden of secrecy and silence round all these tortuous paths and byways of indecision? If she had an aching tooth, would she tramp through the wet and the wind in ceaseless rounds, of which the dentist was the fixed centre? This very night she would take the letter up to the Cliff and leave it at Dixon's. Let him think of her as he would. It was better to bear honourable open pain than ignominious secret torture. The simplicity of the resolve came upon her like a revelation. To think she could have been beating about the threshold of this decision so long without the courage to enter. But that is always the way. When the pain of the tooth first takes us we submit to its suffering. It is only when it has broken our spirit that we are driven on weak legs to the fatal brass plate, and bemoan the many hours of wasted anguish that might have been saved had we made use of the true light when it first illuminated us.

CHAPTER XLIV

Soon all was abustle at the Post Office in preparation for the departing mail. The kettle commenced to throb upon the red embers of the little kitchen fire, and pushing out a blithe volume of steam through its pursed lips, appeared to be whistling light-heartedly at the immediate prospect of the cup that cheers. From the second kitchen came the melodious clink of the cups and saucers and tea-spoons; gladsome tea-table music, heard at four o'clock on a hot summer's day, with its queer cracked thirds and minor intervals and faulty diatonics. James Maskill rattled up to the Post Office door again, over the great round cobbles, and tying the reins up into a loop, stimulated hot and dusty letter-bringers to frantic final efforts with fierce cries that he was on the point of departure.

"Noo then, ye needn't gie ower runnin' if ah'm to tek it."

"Ah s'd sit down, if I was you, an' watch me gan."

"Ay, theer, ye'll 'ave to mek use o' yer legs."

"Noo, ah'm just away an' all, so ye know."

Whereupon, at Pam's invitation, he retired to partake of a cup of smoking tea on the Post Office counter—that reappeared immediately upon his forehead in the form of globules—and doubling up plum-bread and butter by laying it flat on his great outstretched palm and closing his hand upon it, slipped it down his mouth cornerwise, as easily as posting a letter. Every now and then he gave his tea-cup a vigorous stir to shake up the sugar in it, and darting to the door of the Post Office, scanned the street up and down for distant letter-bearers on its horizon.

"Noo then," he cried out at Ding Jackson, lurking onward from afar. "'Ow much longer div ye think ah s'll wait for ye?"

"Ah don't know, an' ah don't care," Dingwall Jackson responded irreverently.

"Don't ye?" shouted the postman, with sudden ire.

"Naw," Ding Jackson shouted back at him, going better. "Ah've no letters."

"Ay, bud ye'll know if ah get 'old on ye," James Maskill cried threateningly, shaking a doubled fist like a great red brick at him, and as heavy. "An' ye'll care too. Ye dommed saucy young divvle."

"Gie ower sweerin'," cried Ding Jackson, as loudly as he could. He almost twisted his interior in the effort to publish the postman's offence throughout Ullbrig. "Feythur, James Maskill's sweerin' at me."

"Ay, ye sewd try an' curb your tongue, Jaames," the postmaster counselled him as he scowled back to his tea-cup. "It's a 'asty member wi' all on us, an' stans i' need o' bridlin'."

"Ah'll bridle 'im," said James morosely, stirring up the sugar again, this time like the dregs of discord. ". . . When ah get 'im. An' ah know very well where ah can leet of 'im" (alight on him).

At other times this wicked conduct of James's would have grieved and disappointed Pam, particularly in face of his recent struggles and improvements, but to-day she felt no right to be grieved. Indeed, this sin seemed so inconsiderable by the side of her own that she envied the postman his comparative state of sinlessness. To call somebody a "devil" (which Ding Jackson undoubtedly was, at any time that you used the appellation to him; morning, noon, or night), what was that? But to steal something from somebody who'd been

responded; and in a lower tone, according to custom: "Is there owt 'at ah can do for ye o' my way?"

Dear, faithful, honest, good-hearted fellow! How he loved her, Pam told herself bitterly. How he trusted her, vile character that she was. How his goodness ought to stimulate and strengthen her own, and draw her back, if so might be, to the old paths she had trodden once.

"No, thank you, James," she said after a pause—in which James only imagined she was trying to think of something.

"Not to-night?" said the hallowed one.

"Not to-night . . . thank you," Pam told him.

If a kiss would have been any good to him . . . and he'd asked for it, he would have got it then. Poor James! Lost a kiss because he never dreamed of thinking it would be there, or asking on the off chance.

"Ah'm still . . . tryin' my best," he assured Pam, round the door-post. "Ah'm not same man ah was, bud that d . . . Dingwall, ah mean, gets better o' me yet. Ah know ah s'll not be right while ah've fetched 'im a bat across 'is lugs. Nor 'e won't, saucy young . . . sod. Bud ah've not gidden up tryin'."

He had not given up trying. And she—was she trying?

Oh, James, James, James! After many days you are bringing back her soul's bread to her. Pray that she feed upon it and be strong. She needs it.

"Good-neet," said James.

"Good-night, James," said Pam.

The postman raised his voice.

"Good-neet, Emma."

"Good-neet, Jaames Maskill," Emma responded.

"Good-neet, Missis Morland."

"Good-neet, Jim lad."

"Good-neet, agen," James said to the postmaster.

"Neet, James. Ye'll 'ev another nice jonney," the postmaster told him.

"Ay, neet's about best part o' day, noo," James responded.

He took up the bag, and lingering, cast one extra "Good-neet" over his shoulder towards the door-post once more, in his second and softer voice. It didn't seem for anybody in particular, but more as though he had it to spare, and might as well leave it at the Post Office as anywhere. Pam's voice, however, registered acceptance of it from within, with the grateful inflection for a very welcome gift.

"Ay, good-neet," said the postman, giving her another

forthwith; and after hesitating on the impulse of a third, hardened his mouth, swung the bag off the counter by its narrow neck, lunged out into the lurid sunlight, pulled the cart down to meet him, sprang into his place, said "Gee" and "Kt," and was round the brewer's corner in a twinkling, leaving golden clouds behind him.

And as soon as tea was over and the things were cleared, and the house commenced to slip into its peaceful evening mood, she set her plans in motion for the carrying out of her resolve. Viewing the recent discredit into which her washing had fallen with Miss Morland, it required all her nerve to brace herself for a visit of this nature to the bright bedroom overlooking the garden; but stealing a moment when Emma was absent, she did it, changed her light dress for a darker of navy blue, and descended, prepared to receive all Emma's scorn now that it could no longer deter her from her intention. But Emma was nowhere visible when she reached ground-floor again; her accumulated reserves of meekness and charity had been vainly stored. And now her first object was to secure the letter. She reconnoitred the rooms once more, with the end that she might possess herself of it, and hold it in readiness for the first suitable moment that might offer her a chance of departure without being seen. Such departure would not be yet, of course. It would not be till the dusk was well fallen, and the moon on the rise. Until that time

had never raised his head. Dejected and anxious, she stole back to the little kitchen and twisted her knuckles by the window, watching the slowly deepening sky—so reflective of her own sinking gloom. From here the postmaster's approaching steps drove her into the second kitchen. From the second kitchen the sound of Emma Morland, humming a hymn-tune severely through her tightened lips, and advancing by the passage door, drove her back again, and—as Emma still pushed her advance—up the corkscrew staircase for the second time this night.

"Where's Pam?" Miss Morland inquired acutely of the postmaster, when she entered—not that she was in active pursuit or need of her, but that the girl's absences now were always a source of suspicious inquiry and speculation.

"En't ye seed 'er?" the postmaster asked innocently. "She's nobbut just this moment come oot o' kitchen an' ganned upstairs."

"Ay, to wash 'ersen, ah s'd think," Miss Morland reflected shrewdly to herself. "Ah'd gie seummut to know what lass's after."

At that moment, if it could have been revealed to her, the lass was after listening at the top of the staircase with a twisted ear to their solicitudes concerning her whereabouts. Once upon a time, she told herself while she did it, she would never have listened to anything that anybody said, whether she had been the subject of it or not. But now, listening seemed part of her natural defence; she listened with no interest in the thing heard, except only as a means for her own intelligence and safety. At the first sound of words her suspicious ear was up like a cat's at the chattering of birds.

From her place at the head of the twisted stairs she was driven into her bedroom once more by Mrs. Morland. Then, when calm had been restored to the recently ruffled atmosphere of the post house, and it was possible to probe by ear to the uttermost corners of it, she slipped out a cautious head, chose her moment, and stole down by the Sunday staircase. Very gently she pressed upon the parlour door with her cushioned fingers . . . very gently . . . gently, gently, just so that she . . . gently . . . gently . . . could catch a glimpse.

Ah!

The treacherous door had cracked, all at once, like a walnut-shell under her boot-heel. She was halfway up the stairs again in a trice; holding her palpitating heart and listening terribly over the bannisters for the sounds that should proclaim

discovery of her attempt. But none came. Baffled, goaded with desire, half-crying with fear of her enterprise's failure, and yet unable to cry because she lacked the tears to cry with, being only able to pull painful faces; desperate to achieve her purpose and terrified with her own desperation, she was up and down the staircase after this a dozen times; back into her bedroom, listening at the head of the corkscrew stairs; holding her ear to every point of the compass. But never dared she essay entrance of the parlour. That door, just ajar on its hinges, held her more effectually at bay than had it been bolted with great bolts and locked and barred. Dusky night descended, the time was getting ripe for her purpose . . . and still she lacked the letter.

Then the greater terror out-terrorised the lesser. Fear of what the consequences might be should she not achieve her purpose to-night drove her downstairs for the last time, and into the parlour. With an air of reckless innocence that pretends it has nothing to be afraid or ashamed of, she pushed the door wide and strode into the room. In the simulation of guiltlessness her bearing for the moment was almost defiant, as though she were braced for going into some hated presence. And indeed, for all the assuring silence of the parlour, she advanced with the full expectation of seeing the schoolmaster's figure looming forth from the table, with his hands to his ears and his back to her, as he had been on her first arrival. But

CHAPTER XLV

THE letter was not there.

Like a wild animal bereft of its young, when the first shock of discovery had had its way with her, she set herself with both hands to rummage the contents of the desk, as though sheer frenzy of desperation alone could restore to her that which was lost. Scarcely even did she regard the objects that her delving brought to the surface, but dug and tore at them all with a blind, consuming energy that revealed the unreasoning horror of her mind; turning and returning and overturning; now above, now below; selecting each thing seemingly with the prefixed idea to reject.

It was not there. The letter that all her life and honour hung upon, that she had thought to place there with her own hands, was not there. It was gone. There did not remain a trace of it. On the floor, upon her hand and knees, she sought distractedly, stroking the carpet with passionate solicitude to deliver her the letter that was not hers—as though it were a great, rough-coated beast that she was coaxing.

And there, on her hands and knees, the schoolmaster came upon her. Through the thick walls of her engrossment she never heard him; care she had thrown to the winds.

Still groping and coaxing, and peering over the floor in the fast gathering dusk, she saw for the first time the shadow that watched her. It said no word at the moment of her rising. Slowly and tremblingly she rose upward, like a faint exhalation, a phantom. Had she continued her vaporous ascent through the ceiling, and through the bedroom ceiling above that, and through the red-tiled roof, and forth into the great eternity of dissolution and nothingness, it would scarcely have been out of keeping with the strange slow spirituality of her rising. All the passionate heat of her search cooled before that presence; her body, that had been so assiduous in its enterprise, froze suddenly to ice; the very life seemed to have been smitten out of her, and her rising but the last muscular relaxation of a body from which the soul had fled.

"Are you . . . looking for something?" the shadow asked

her, after a terrible moment's silence, when the girl's guilty heart seemed trying to cry aloud and betray her.

It was the old schoolmaster's voice that uttered the question; the tight, hoarse whisper that seemed to strangle his throat in the utterance like a drawn cord. And it was the old schoolmaster's figure that waited upon her answer; the remorseless, condemnatory figure with its hands to its collar, that always, whatever she did, threw her in the wrong. All their intervening relations seemed cut out and done away with. They were back again, splicing their lives at the point where these had broken off on that memorable night in the kitchen. He was above her once more, on the great high judgment seat, and she . . . down here—a poor, frail, inconsequential sinner—struggled and wrestled in the bondage of silence before him.

"I?" She spoke in an unsteady voice, all blown to pieces with short breaths, as though she had been running fast and far. "No, no! Only something that I . . . that I . . . I thought I'd dropped. Nothing at all . . . thank you. It doesn't matter."

She wanted to pass him quickly on the strength of that denial—a lie on the face of itself—and get away somewhere, to her bedroom again, before he could question her further; but he stood there without moving, as he had stood in the moonlight, and she dared not advance. She had the fear

Had she spoken the words with a hollow reed under her lips the tone would have been no more empty.

"It is safe," he said.

And something in the malicious utterance, something significant of exultation for a victory unfairly come by, revealed to the girl in a flash when, and by what abominable means, it had come into the man's possession.

"You took it," she cried at him, flinging the accusation into his face as though it were a glove from the hand of outraged honour. "You stole it out of my desk!" With all the rapid process of moral despoliation that had been at work upon her during these latter days, and with all the resultant complaisance for crime, the old indignation rose up strong in her against the idea of a mean, petty theft like this. It seemed she might never have sinned or known sin herself, so clear and righteous was her moral eye become of a sudden. "You thief!" she threw at the man. "Coward and thief!"

He made no attempt to resent or defend himself against these puny javelins of her anger. Possession of the letter was so impregnable a position that he could afford to let her expend her ammunition fruitlessly against the walls of his silence.

"And if I did take it?" he asked her merely, in tones of gathering assurance.

"It was not yours to take," she panted at him. "It does not belong to you. Give it me back. You have no right to it."

"It belongs to neither of us," he said, yet without anger. With such a power as this letter in his pocket gave him, he had no need of anger. And of justification he sought none. "My right is as much as yours . . . and I am prepared to stand by it. Call me a thief if you like; mere names won't hurt me . . . your own harsh treatment has hardened me too much for that. We are both of us thieves."

". . . I was going to take it back to-night . . ." the girl protested, part in asseveration of her innocence, part in supplication that he should restore her the letter.

"Perhaps you were," he said, with a callous indifference to her intentions that boded ill for his own. Apparently he was little concerned with the girl's atonement or questions of restitution. "But I have something . . . to say to you first. We cannot talk here. Put on your hat . . . we will go outside."

His assumption of authority and dominion roused the last

red cinders of the girl's independence. Now that her back was to the wall and further retreat was impossible, the energy, hitherto dribbling away in futile skirmishes, accumulated itself in frontal activity. She was shamed—bitterly, horribly shamed—but even shame has its pride.

"Give me the letter . . ." she said doggedly, and held out her hand.

"Put on your hat . . ." he told her. "We will talk about that outside."

"I will not go with you. Give me the letter first. If you give me the letter I will go."

"You shall have the letter back . . . in good time. Not now. If you speak so loudly they will hear us. Put on your hat."

"I will not put on my hat."

" . . . I think you will."

"When will you give me back the letter?"

"When . . . we have come to an understanding."

The word "understanding" tolled out across the dreary wastes of her consciousness like a death-bell.

" . . . Will you give it me to-night?"

"We can discuss that."

"Give it me now . . . and I will go with you."

"No; I cannot give it you now. You have had your way . . . in other things. I must have mine, for once, in this.

the degree to which the man was prepared to push his ill-gotten power.

"But you will," he said.

There was something so black about the insinuation—as though he himself were anxious to save her the sight of what might be in store for her if she persisted—that she dared hazard no second contingency. They remained for a second or two in silence, and the slow melting of her obstinacy into consent was as palpable during these moments as the melting away of a fragment of ice on a fishmonger's slab. No other word passed between them then. Very quietly the schoolmaster opened the door and stood by the wall while the girl slid by him, cowed and trembling.

The postmaster, sitting on the high Governmental stool in the Post Office, with his back to the window and his newspaper held up above his head to catch the last red reflection from the darkening sky, staring upward at the crowded firmament of print through his great glasses as though he were star-gazing, heard the front door close, and looking over the ribbed glass screen into the roadway, saw Pam and the schoolmaster pass together in the direction of the brewer's corner.

"Emma," said he, putting his head in at Miss Morland's door next moment; and more urgently still, not discerning her there at first in the dusk: "Emma lass, are ye theer?"

"Ay, ah seed 'em," said the severe voice of his daughter. "Div ye want lamp noo?"

CHAPTER XLVI

THAT same night the Ullbrig chimes were as clear to hear at Cliff Wrangham as though they'd rung in Dixon's stackgarth, and Dixon shook his head.

"Yon's a bad sound," said he dubiously. "Ah'm jealous we s'll be gettin' some rain before morn."

And while all Ullbrig slept (save two), and all Cliff Wrangham (save one), a great, black, umbrella-shaped cloud pushed up its head into the sky above where the sun had sunk, like a mammoth mushroom. Soon there were no stars left behind Ullbrig church for the tower to show against; half the sky was black as ink and the mushroom still growing. Out of the advancing darkness came wafts of cool, wet wind that shook the sleeping windows and casements gently, as though to awaken them to preparation, and bid them: "Be ready—we are coming." And almost while their breath was whispering the warning, the first raindrop spat sideways against the Spawer's window, and after that the second and a third and a fourth. And thenceforward, through the hours till daybreak —that never broke at all—the silence seethed with the steadfast downpouring of rain. Sometimes as the shifting, but inaudible, breeze blew the vast wall of water slantwise on its side to one way or another, the Spawer's window would be furiously lashed for a space, and bear noisy testimony to the force of the downpour; then the fall slanted off again, and the air was full of a great, surfy, soundless roar—as though silence were on the boil—telling where the raindrops lashed into corn cut and standing; and boxed the ears out of ripe barley; and hissed into the oats; and beat among the crackling pods of beans; and thrashed the trees and the hedges; and pounded the leaves of turnips into the wet earth as though you had pushed them there with the ferrule of your walking-stick.

such wholesale destruction of the labour of man's hours—accepted with the resignation born of experience and training. Their submission, indeed, is the attitude of slaves, that dare not complain of ill-treatment to the master who has whipped them, for fear of a chastisement that may be worse.

All over the country-side this night there would be white faces peering out through the streaming wet windows, for your farmer is a light sleeper where his crops are at stake; and men's low, calamitous voices heard discussing the swift change in their prospects; and stocking-feet stirring muffled about boarded floors; and bedposts creaking as occupants sit up in them, and roll out with sudden-roused anxiety or throw themselves flat again in the despondency that knows too well to need any ocular confirmation of its fears; and the sounds of masters, calling urgently upon men by name in the great attic above, to inquire whether this, that, or the other had been safely done last night before turning in.

"Jaames, did ye traw onny shavs across t' blaades when ye'd gotten loosed oot?" (James, did you throw any sheaves across the blades when you unharnessed?)

Or, "Ez reaper gotten t' sheet ower 'er?"

Or, "Which on ye wez last to come oot o' barn? Did ye think on to fast'n door well, noo?"

Daylight, coming tardily enough, showed a wet and sodden landscape, from which all semblance of summer and harvest and sunshine had been swilled, as though it had been a bright dyed petticoat, with its colours wasted in the wash. There might never have been a sun; never a summer; never a harvest; never a burning, blue-skied August day something less than twenty-four hours ago. It was the end of things with a vengeance. The imagination, drowned under all this wetness, lacked power to reconstruct out of these damp and steaming constituents the picture of a fine day. It was the pluvial epoch returned. Short of a million years the world would never be dry.

And in these days it rained.

Sometimes vertical, with a terrible unrelenting directness; sometimes aslant, showing a leisurely inclination (almost friendly by comparison with the other), the great ribbed curtain hung down from its grey-black canopy, shutting out everything but a few sodden fields of immediate foreground, with the smoking cattle moving disconsolately over them. The Dixon family, upreared on a great foundation of elbows at the two windows of the big, warm kitchen, kneeled on chairs and

watched it, staring out fixedly at the unchanging aspect, while the rain slid past their eyes in a monotonous, interminable blind, always descending, never down; or lifted their eyes to its starting-place and let them be brought to ground by the downpour, and to the top and down again, and so on—dreary rides for the idle imagination, like sliding down the banisters. Occasionally, for relaxation, they chanted the monotony of the scene with solo and chorus.

"Mah wod, it rains."

"Mah wod, bud it rains."

"It's a wet day, this."

"Eeh! Dun't it rain. Mah wod, it diz rain."

"Look noo. It's comin' doon noo."

"Dizzn't it come doon noo."

"Dizzn't it come doon straight. See-ye!"

"You'd come doon straight, mebbe, if ye'd come as far."

"It's blowin' ower sea."

"What's blowin' ower sea?"

"Rain is."

"Are You blowin' ower sea? It's not done blowin' ower land yet."

"Nay, that it en't. We s'll 'ave a sup noo we'm started."

From time to time Dixon, encased in his great goloshed leggings, with their half-dozen leather tongues protruding through as many buckles between boot and knee and his

of mud from their frisky, over-joyous heels, and take the rubber mouth-piece in their eager mouths and suck the white liquid thirstily out of the inverted bottle, wagging their tails like a fussy telegraph needle, and giving great digs with their noses upwards, as though they were inducing the maternal teat to yield them more liberal flow.

At intervals, too, the stack of faces at the window is ruthlessly demolished by the withdrawal of its key-shoulders. Amy, slipping a horse-rug over his head, goes off to the stable, warm as pie with the living warmth of six big bodies, and filled from end to end with the solaceful music of munching, whither, as the downpour continues, flee other members of the family; refugees to well-known and appreciated sanctuary. Jeff and Jim under one top-coat, butting both their heads at the door for admission; and Jarge Yenery, with a canvas jacket thrown over his shoulders and tied at his throat with a piece of hemp-twine—who takes his battered straw hat and shakes the rain off it on to the cobbles on entering, before a-wandering what will be doing at Sproutgreen ti-daay; and they all sit on the big corn bin and talk harvest-field lore (of which Jarge Yenery is a past master) till, as he gets to the thick of his reminiscences, the mouths of his listeners open like oysters in oatmeal water. And the Irishmen, who have been sitting on the bran-box in the calf-house, hearing the grateful hum of voices, come slouching into the stable with their characteristic harvest-field walk: a kind of roll from the hips, with their thumbs in their leathern belts and a give-in at the middle at each step. Not being Christians or human beings, but only poor Papist Irishmen, they do not intrude themselves into the conversation. They duck their heads in silent greeting; spit on the cobbles, and then squat down against the wall with their knees to their chin at the extreme fringe of the charmed circle, as though they might be warming themselves, from a respectful distance, at somebody else's fire.

And while these make common stock of companionship in the stable, and the calves, hearing the hum of voices through the cracked partition, baal out pathetically for man's attention, and butt the empty wooden pails angrily about their pen, with a great rattle of handle, because they can't find any milk in them; and the cocks and hens gather together under the cart-shed, a medley of disconsolate feathers, spreading over the wheelbarrow and the drill like a counterpane; and the duck-lings, soaked through and through, green with ordure and much wallowing in sloppy dunghills, trail off here and there,

like a disreputable file of over-night inebriates, oblivious to all but their own unhallowed enjoyment; and the cattle stand in their steam like clothes'-horses; and the birds hide in the thick hedges, taking but short, sharp flights into the open, and quickly regaining cover—another farmer stands before his rain-swilled window, hands in pockets and mouth screwed up for a whistle that never comes, and surveys his prospects in the harvest-field with a heart as heavy as any round this country-side.

Of what was he a farmer? What were his lands? What his crops? Goodness knows exactly—he least of all. But the simile was there, indefinite and unapplied within his being; and the three odd miles of falling drops that lay between him and Ullbrig were like a great water-curtain to his summer happiness, never more to be lifted. All this desolation of wet stubble and dripping sheaves, soaked land and bubbling rain-pools, had its transcription in his own existence. It was the great full score, and he was the pocket pianoforte edition of it—that was all. Through and through he was saturated with despondent rains; stood in the steam of his own drenched person as the cattle did; shivered almost at the chill of this fresh, water-cooled atmosphere, and tried vainly to recall some remembered comfort from those many days of liberal warmth and sunlight and happiness that had gone to the making of his life here before. For here, at the very time when every second was of importance to him, was come rain like the first Flood, cutting him off ruthlessly from the girl, and leaving him stranded apart to his punishment, as though he had been one of Noah's unelect. Now in the hour of deluge could he upbraid himself with neglect of precious moments in the harvest-field. He had sharpened his sickle, edge on, edge off, till its blade was worn almost through, and in the end he had done nothing with it.

One by one the avenues of approach were being shut to him; shortly their alienation would be complete. At times he had wild inspiration to brave the wide watery wall, make up a bogus brown-paper parcel of a few old handkerchiefs and a collar or two, address it to nobody in particular at some remote station of our remotest colonies, and bombard the Post Office for its despatch. And again he plotted tramping through the rain for the purchase of a money order. Pam did these mostly —she'd told him so herself—when she was in the house, because her writing was so quick and clear.

Ah, yes; perhaps. She would make out money orders for anybody but him. The chance of trapping her into the Office

with such paltry bait was so remote that he dared not venture upon it.

Then he said to himself that he would sit down and write a beautiful letter to the girl herself, begging forgiveness for inasmuch as he had offended, and asking her to see him once —just once—before he . . .

Before he . . .

Heaven help him! Before he lost his reason.

Every moment resolution kept inflating him to one purpose or other like a balloon, and yet, while buoying him on the strained tip-toe of the act, left him—without gas enough—just short of ascension. Instead, he mooned before the window; commenced snatches of musical enterprise at the piano. Bah! how his very gorge rose at the touch of the keys and the music that came from his fingers, so sickeningly sweetened with the sugars of love unsatisfied; so cloying with the glucose of past happiness, that turned to acid on the stomach and made him ill. And from the piano, urged on by a gnawing appetite for activity of some sort, he made dashes round about the farmstead to the various centres of congregation—to the stable, to the calf-house, and to the big barn—where at intervals they had mighty matches of cricket with a soft penny ball, an oak staff, and three stack pegs.

For three days the rain fell, almost without intermission. At times, for variation, great big-bellied clouds of white mist rolled over the land from the sea, and hid it, and rolled away again. They heard the booming of the minute-gun from Farnboro', and the hoot of passing steamers. More than once, during these three days, he extended his excursions—with fitful energy of action—right beyond the confines of Dixon's farm, and showed a set face of purpose towards Ullbrig. But it was all mere moonshine. The thought of his advent in Ullbrig village, with his streaming mackintosh and soaking cap and be-muddied boots, deterred him from his folly in time. And whenever he turned back it was always with a certain consolatory pious pain of renunciation, as though he had just got the better of a great temptation, and had gained a victory instead of losing one.

CHAPTER XLVII

EARLY on the morning of the fourth day, which was a Saturday, Barclay was sighted in his spring cart, driving down to Ullbrig to catch Tankard's bus; the farm lad sat by his side to hold up the great gig umbrella, with cylindrical slashes in its cover, through which a cow could have jumped, and two or three of its complete ribs showing. Dixon, standing at the pump in his white waterproof and leggings, his corn-sack headgear, and his sixpenny telescope, as though he'd been a skipper, and Barclay's cart (with miniature waves of water curling off at its wheels), an apparently friendly craft, hailed him as the farm lad consigned to his master the care of the umbrella, and clambered down to throw open the lane gate.

"Noo then."

"Noo then," said Barclay in turn, showing his face, and waving the reins at him with the right hand.

"Ye're not cuttin' owt to-day, it seems?" Dixon inquired jocularly

its rents as a window, held further parley with Dixon at close quarters by the same gate—that Dixon opened for him to save a dismount—concerning his master's departure, and the world in general. The conversation brightened Dixon's face as it proceeded, and sent him back to the house with a sparkle in his eye, as though he'd been asked to pronounce judgment on a glass of XXX, and could say "Proper stuff this!" with all his heart.

"Noo, ah've gotten to larn seummut ti morn, onny road," he announced to the household assembled in the big kitchen, from whose window the stack of faces had been interestedly observant of this second conversation. And in response to the very general inquiry: "What 'a ye larnt, then?" answered with another: "What div ye think?"

"What sewd we think, an' all?" Miss Bates demanded rebelliously. "Folks like me 'as no time to think."

"Nay, they'd do better if they did," Dixon assented, with his imperturbable geniality.

"Ay, or they'd do less, 'appen," Miss Bates snapped at him.

"Ah don't know i' what way," Dixon decided amiably. "Noo, div ye gie it up? Ah bet ye weean't guess, onny on ye."

"Sun's shinin' i' Oolbrig, 'appen," Arny suggested.

"Feythur Mostyn's gannin' to slart (daub) a sup o' paint ower t' front of 'is 'oose," Jeff said.

"Nay, ye'll none on ye get gain (near) 'and it," Dixon said, not desiring, however, to give them too much rope, lest they might. "It's a weddin'."

"Ay, an' ah know 'oo's it is!" Miss Bates cried, emerging suddenly at the open door of her rebellious silence, to demonstrate the superiority of her intelligence, and shaking it at him as though it were a broom. "It's Pam's, an' she's gannin' to marry schoolmester."

"Ay, that's right enough," Dixon said, with the perceptible reluctance of admission that would have wished the news—or Miss Bates' guess—to have been otherwise, particularly in view of her triumphant: "Ah knowed very well."

"'Oo telt ye she was, though?" Jeff demanded of his father, with Thomasine unbelief.

"Barclay lad, just noo."

"An' where did 'e get it fro'?"

"Nay, 'e'd gotten it off too well for me to ask 'im owt o' that. 'E telt me it wor ower village 'at schoolmester 'ad

asked Pam to 'ave 'im, an' she'd ta'en 'im. Ah'm not sure schoolmester 'issen 'adn't telt a goodish few."

"Ay, 'e'll want to tell 'em an' all," Miss Bates agreed gustily. "'E's been after 'er long enough. Mah wod! Ah'd 'a seed 'er somewhere before ah'd 'a looked at 'er twice, all time she's been snuffin' 'er nose at me. They want giein' marriage, both on 'em. Ah sewd 'a 'ad to be asked a good few times before ah'd tek up wi' a man same as yon—old enough to be my feythur, very nigh."

"Ay, it teks all sorts to mek a wuld," Dixon pronounced drily. "We s'll see what sort on a man teks up wi' you, 'appen."

"'Appen," said Miss Bates, with great reservoirs of meaning wisdom dammed up behind the accent of that word. And then, not finding quite sufficient satisfaction in this inflectional superiority, could not resist the temptation to cry out: "Bud 'e'll 'ave to be different fro' be yon sort of a man, onny road."

"When's weddin'?" Arny asked.

"Nay, ah can't tell ye owt more, wi'oot mekkin' it up," Dixon said. "Pick what there is for yersens. Ah lay, ye'll manage to fin' seummut fresh in it." And looking towards the mid-parlour door: "'As 'e come doon yet?" he inquired.

"Ay, a goodish bit sin'," Miss Bates said. "Bud ah thought it was women 'at did all gossipin'!" she declaimed

CHAPTER XLVIII

SUNDAY morning opened out scowlingly, with an angry watery look that saw no pleasure in anything. There was no rain, but there were great black clouds heaped up in the sky, every one containing a thunderstorm, if not a couple. Such clouds they were as you can make for yourselves by dipping a thumb in ink and smearing circularly over paper. Between the superimposed piles of them at times, as they rifted, the cold grey light poured down upon the level landscape below like pailfuls of water. The chill drops still spangled everywhere from the recent rain. Every bird that flew out of the hedges scattered diamonds in its passage. The grass was bowed down beneath its watery burden, drop upon drop was strung on the bended blades. The trailing porch of flowering tea hung weightily over the door, ready to discharge its accumulated wetness down any neck that passed under. On all the window-sills were long, tremulous watery rows of jewels. The whitewashed walls of the house were soaked and mottled; everywhere about the path and laneways were great pools of gathered water, shivering under the breath that blew over them now and again, in apprehension of more.

A very day, indeed, for hot coffee, odorous ham, and smoking mushrooms—as all these ministrants to the stomach's comfort on the Spawer's breakfast-table there are—but the Spawer only looks at them in staring disregard, breaks bread without biting, and dips feverish lips to cup for assurance of a flavour which endless stirring cannot seemingly reconcile to his palate.

This last blow about Pam has struck him so suddenly and so forcefully that he can only keep feeling himself over, and wonder what bones are broken, and how many. His pride, he knows, has suffered a nasty shock. All along he has been reckoning upon the girl as though she were an actual possession, to be left or taken at his own sweet will; a fixed star in the firmament. And lo! now he finds she is very much of a planet, with a path of her own, that has swum into his ken and swum out again, leaving the astronomer stuck in

the mud with his telescope to his eye, a pitiable object of miscalculation.

And by turns he is incredulous and despairing, and hopeful and indignant and irate. She is not going to be married. It is a lie. There is no truth in it. She is going to be married. The shadow-man, the moonlight, the parting, her avoidance of him—all point to the truth of it.

Pam was marrying a pair of bell-bottomed trousers and a shabby morning coat. Horrible! horrible!

Oh, the sting was bitter! The disappointment supreme. Even his love for the girl was so steeped in the sense of humiliation and of grief that she should have fallen to such extent below the standard of his measurement, that at times almost he failed to tell whether he really loved her any longer, or was possessed only of pity.

He couldn't believe it. On his soul, he couldn't believe it. He knew it was true, but he couldn't believe it. On Sunday morning, wet or fine, he must go to Ullbrig and learn the truth. Father Mostyn would be sure to know and tell him.

And meanwhile he had to garb himself with the extra scrupulousness of attire for covering his torn pride. Now that he was humbled he must be very proud. He must show no tell-tale flinchings. He must laugh with the lazy, half-contemptuous humour, as though this little rustic world

CHAPTER XLIX

It lacked yet some minutes to service time when the Spawer passed up the path to church. In the porch old Obadiah Beestman, with a bell-rope in one hand and a bell-rope in the other, and his right foot slung in the noose of a third, was still ringing his dismal ding, dang, dong, as the Spawer entered. Obadiah is also clerk and sexton too, and is shrewdly suspected by his Reverence of Nonconformist proclivities into the bargain.

"Ay, you'll get to know aboot it!" Nonconformist Ullbrig has reproached him more than once. "You that was born an' brought up Primiti', ringin' yon bells of a Sabbath day."

"It's Lord's work!" the bell-ringer responds, uneasily withal, for he has the principles of Primitivism deeply grafted in his nature somewhere, and feels that the mere putting in of attendance at their teas, and consuming of their sausage rolls, will not stand him very well at the Day of Judgment.

"Let them ring 'em 'at was brought up tiv 'em," Ullbrig (in the person of Deacon Jackson and others) tells him. "Ye've nowt to do mixin' yersen up wi' priests an' feythurs, an' all such-like pawpish, divvlish ways. Ye was brought up to drink o' the pure watters o' salvation, an' ye know very well 'at ye weean't get 'em there. Some day, when yer tongue bons (burns) ye, ye'll wish, like rich man, ye'd gotten a drop, an' 'adn't wasted it all when there was as much as ye could do wi'. Ay, an' more. Allelooya."

"Ah ring bells to honour an' glory o' God," Obadiah defends himself. ". . . An' so long as ah don't ring 'em to nawbody else, ah don't see 'E's no call to say owt tiv me. It's not much ah get 'ere on earth for my trouble, an' as for buryin's, there's nowt doin' wi' 'em. Oolbrig's a poor place. It's good enough to wark in, an' addle (earn) a man's meat, bud as soon as 'e's deead it seems 'e can't bide in it no longer. As soon as folks is deead, they want to gan an' be putten away i' Whivvle, or Sproutgreen, or Button Dene, or Merensea, 'appen. Oolbrig's not good enough for 'em, though it's a bit o' fine dry soil—o't

slope an' all, an' they're as well drained there as onnyweers. As for respondin', ah know ah do, bud wosship comes fro' bottom of a man's 'eart, an' not fro' 'is lips."

But to Father Mostyn, what times Obadiah's Primitive convictions are undermost, and he feels this Ullbrig apathy towards the true Church as a slight upon his own performances, he says:

"Well, there's no movin' 'em. Ah mud as lief be ringin' tiv a lot o' cows. Ah've done my best for ye—ye see for yersen—no man alive could do more (if aif as much), bud their 'earts is 'ardened."

He nodded solemn greeting to the Spawer as the Spawer arrived—the ringing of the bells being to Obadiah as much a part of the morning's devotion as the Prayers and Litany—if not more—and told him, "Onny on 'em to left 'and." By which he meant that the Spawer was at liberty to occupy any pew that caught his fancy, without fear of trespassing upon rights or being disturbed. Not a soul, so far, was in church. The Spawer picked his favourite pew, with its faded green cushion and family of hassocks—the grand patriarch standing a foot and a half high, and sloped for the knees to rest on without unnecessary bending; with others of various shapes and sizes, down to the baby sawdust-stuffed buffet, no bigger than a bath bun. Once upon a time, some God-fearing household of the Established Faith had come here week by week to

wife of the above, who departed this life in search of her beloved husband, August 5, 1804.

As the Spawer sits and ponders over these things, trying to assimilate them by a sort of spontaneous process with his own state—and find one common key which shall fit all the varied wards of the locks of life—the worshippers begin to assemble. Mrs. Hesketh, holding her youngest by the hand and piloting it (whether a boy or a girl does not exactly make itself apparent to a superficial observation) up the aisle in front of her, at the manifest peril of falling over it, and trying by jerks of the arm to shake its stare off the Spawer, which, however, requires a stronger arm. They disappear into a pew somewhere under the lectern, where much sibilant whispering begins to issue immediately upon their incarceration, as though they were cooking something; and every second the big forehead of the infant, surmounted by its sailor hat, shows itself as far as the eyebrows over the pew back and goes down suddenly, as though its supports had been sundered. Old Mary Bateman shivers up the aisle too, on the far third-class side, with her brown charity shawl drawn tightly over her shoulders and clasped into the pit of her stomach by invisible hands wrapped up in it, as though she were cold and hungry, and the pinched, alms-house look of humility about the lips of her bowed face befitting a pauper. Being entirely dependent for everything in life upon the mercy of God, and having a very proper value and appreciation of it —which is too infrequently the case with people able to earn their own living—she has long since discarded pride as an unmeaning and useless appanage, and walks humbly before the Lord and her fellow-beings (if they will kindly pardon the liberty of her calling them such) as the devoutest Christian might desire. At Sacrament she will wait until the last lip has left the cup, and only presume to approach the table when sought out and summoned there by the priestly forefinger. And after death she will go underground in a nice deal coffin, as being cheaper and more perishable, so that she may the sooner mix her dust with the soil and make room for somebody else when the time requires. After her comes Mrs. Makewell, who deems it advisable to show herself occasionally beneath the priestly eye, as a reminder that she is still able to go out charing ("God be praised, your Rivrence") at eighteenpence a day, with her beer; also as a midwife when requested; and will give his Reverence judicious samples of her bronchitis during pauses in the service, knowing that his Reverence

hears every cough and scrape and clearing, and bestows port wine upon the worthy. While she is trying to fasten herself into her pew there are sounds of a massive sneck being lifted somewhere round the chancel where the vestry is, and the scuffle of loose boots that are too big for the control of the feet that don't fit them echoing over a flagged floor. This, the Spawer knows by experience, is the choir. He even sees them peering round from the far end of the choir stalls and pushing each other out into the chancel, and hears the strident hiss of much whispering, which at closer quarters would resolve itself into:

"See-ye! Old Moother Bateman! old Moother Bateman!" with an unpublishable effusion upon the subject of this unfortunate from the pen (or the lips, as he wouldn't know what to do with a pen if he had it) of the Ullbrig bard. "Gie ower shovin', ye young divvle." "Look at Spawer fro' Dixon's, like a stuffed monkey in a menagerie." "Let's chuck a pay (pea) at 'im."

The sound of the massive latch resounding acutely through the empty building a second time puts a death-like stop to the chancel activity, and an august step heard passing over the flagstones in lonely majesty of silence announces beyond all doubt that his Reverence has arrived. At the same moment the Spawer, with a strange, nervous fluttering about his heart—as though he were about to face some great

Yes; he was here. Miserable wretch that he was; he was here.

Into his shoulders he drew his neck; wedged his head down firmly, and sat without moving in the corner of his pew. On other Sundays he would have looked round at her and smiled his greeting upward. But not now. He dared not risk any such greeting now, lest he should look to find the girl's face turning from him. Without any shadow of doubt, their alienation was complete. He who had been regarded as a friend at the first was come to be regarded as a persecutor now. Even his presence there this morning was a persecution to the girl; a menace to her. She could trust him no longer. She suspected his intentions of dishonour, and was striving to hold at arm's length a man who hung about the skirts of her encouragement. He renewed his suspended breathing with a measure of relief when he heard the sliding rattle of the manual doors, and knew that her eyes were removed from him at last.

And then he knew that another figure had gone up to the organ loft with the girl, and was contemplating him from on high in his huddled ignominy; a silent, spectral figure, whose flesh seemed constituted of pale moonlight; and whose garb was the shadow of night. If he had been raw meat, and this silent scrutineer a vulture, he could not have been more ruthlessly devoured. Every part of him was being fed upon with the savage gloating of conquest. All over him, through and through, he felt those silent eyes boring their way in satisfaction of their meal. Ah, this was worth a three-mile trudge, with each cloud hanging as ripe for deluge as the drops on the branches for a fall. To the world at large he was a gentleman of mettle, jaunting carelessly defiant of the elements, for the sake of his noonday appetite and a chat with his reverence the Vicar. But in the secret inner bond, subscribed to by these three, he [redacted]n adversary brought to ground in inglorious battle. The girl gave him pity, he knew; she wept over his fall; but the man shouted aloud in unhallowed joy, and reviled him.

CHAPTER L

And then the bell-ringer rang down his bells and came into church, and scuffled quickly into a snuffy black gown that he produced out of the end pew, and drew the wand of office out of its socket, and hurried up the aisle on a painful tip-toe—that let each of his boot-protectored heels down behind him with a click—the ends of his gown blowing about the pew doors and wafting Mrs. Hesketh's hat feathers as he went, and disappeared out of sight beyond the choir stalls (whence a subdued Amen was heard in mixed keys), and reappeared again almost while the tail of his robe was still fluttering in the chancel behind him, walking forward with tremendous solemnity this time, as though he had nothing to do with the man that had gone up before, dropping his eyelids to take the exact religious measurements of every step, and lifting them to gaze straight ahead of him, over the faces of the assembled worshippers, seeming to be conscious of nothing but the sacredness of his own calling, and moved not by legs but by

And the morning service proceeds.

The psalms for the day are read in alternate verses by his reverence the Vicar and the handful of boys that constitute the choir—one of them with a voice that cracks occasionally right down to the crypt—at which catastrophe the rest of the choir is suddenly precipitated with a gasp into silence, as though it had tumbled through this vocal fissure, and only struggles back laboriously to the surface one by one after a verse or two. As they are not, in any sense, a literary brotherhood, and know the written symbols but indifferently well, they occupy the time during Father Mostyn's verse with reading up their own, and rely mainly upon the cessation of his voice for their entrance into response. Consequently, it is not unusual for a whole half-verse belonging to his Reverence to be suddenly bowled down owing to some misconception of a pause, and trampled over mercilessly, like a child in a mad bull scare. For the avoidance of which disaster his Reverence will at times be heard marshalling and officering his forces during the progress of his own text, as, for instance: "O God, Thou art my God (steady there, steady); early will I see Thee. (Not yet, not yet.) My flesh longeth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee, in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is (Ha! come along with you. All together)."

To which appeal they come along with a rush as though they were charging the trenches, leaving the dead and dying behind them. The assembled congregation also lends the encouragement of a subdued murmur to the enterprise without committing itself to audibility. All, that is, with the exception of the respectful pauper, who does not presume to mingle her voice with her very much betters, that can afford to pay their way to heaven Sunday by Sunday, and are not a constituted charge upon the Almighty. Instead, she stands with her shawl nipped about her and her head bent—preserving the same old attitude of broken humility both for standing up and sitting down with. She never takes the liberty of making herself comfortable in the corner of her pew—as the Spawer does, for instance—lest perchance the Almighty might repent Him of her weekly half-crown, and bestow it upon another, more humble and deserving.

And so the service proceeds, with hymns and with prayer; with standings, kneelings, and sittings. At times the tinted diamond windows and the stained glass tryptich of the Crucifixion in the east window darken ominously. All the church is filled with an unearthly tenebra. The figure of

Father Mostyn and the six restless white surplices in the choir stalls appear to recede into supernatural darkness, as though the clouds of the Lord were enfolding them for translation. Celestial doves, descending from above the head of Christ crucified, over the altar table, would only be a fitting consummation to the scene. Slowly all the colour is absorbed out of the stained east window. Christ Himself, the Cross, Mary Magdalene, and the Disciples are gathered into the divine gloom of that first Passion. The green shrubs, shivering portentously in the churchyard against the leaded panes, rattle their leaves of a sudden like rain, and the assembled congregation turns its assembled faces, featureless blots of grey in the deep dusk, towards the windows with a visible gaze of apprehension. But the rain is not yet. The darkness turns to a deep yellow; and from yellow to a ghastly ashen grey that makes corpses of them all; and from this grey to the dull light of a damp morning again, and the verger steals up the church a second time and precedes Father Mostyn some six paces to the pulpit steps, and stands aside—resolutely refusing to look at him as he passes—and steals up the steps after him, almost on all fours, while he is at prayer—as though guilty of evil intentions—and shuts him stealthily in, to make sure of him, and gets down again without his Reverence's having noticed him once, and is back in his own pew just as his Reverence raises his head.

of all, perhaps, is his masterly manipulation of the Book. To name a text is to find it at once, with a single twist of the wrist.

"Ha!" says he, in the midst of his discourse, "let's see what the prophet Enoch says." And the prophet Enoch comes up under his fingers, to the very page and text and chapter. The same with Samuel and the tribes of Judah and all the disciples. While Mrs. Hesketh is stirring up the pages of her Bible for the text, like a Christmas plum-pudding, as a lesson in religious deportment to the infant Hesketh, his Reverence has summoned it under his fingers with one beautiful gesture, as though he were a conjuror, demonstrating how superlatively easy the whole thing is, and passed on to the next. Indeed, you might be almost tempted to believe (as the Spawer was) that he never turned the texts up at all, but had them all in his head, and merely performed sleight-of-hand with the pages.

This, however, is rank heretical reasoning, and not to be sustained seriously for a moment, if we value our salvation. Heresy, of course, forms a dominant subject in the discourse; and we are bidden to rake out all the little weeds of dissent that grow up under our feet unnoticed.

"Above all," says the preacher, speaking ever to himself, and looking down his nose to the inside of him for his own appreciation (not crediting us with any), ". . . beware of the sin of idolatry. Ha! that's a deadly sin. To bend your knees in church. That's idolatry. To bow before Jehovah. That's idolatry. Raise your hats to the minister from Merensea, because he's a servant of the Lord, and do less than that to the Lord Himself, because it would be idolatry to Him. Ha! when we pray, let's take care not to go down upon our knees. To go down on our knees is an idolatrous invention of the devil. Let's sit forward on the edge of the cushion, and make believe we're kneeling. The Lord 'll never know the difference. As for bowing our heads . . . let it be far from us.

"But now just let's see what a man like Moses did when he worshipped. We may get a few useful hints from him. Ha! here we are. Beautiful! beautiful! Exodus xxxiv., verse 8: 'And Moses made haste, and bowed toward the earth, and worshipped.'

"Ha! everything Ullbrig doesn't do, Moses did. Made haste; bowed his head; worshipped. Ullbrig doesn't make haste. Ullbrig has too many other things to do on a Sunday. Ullbrig does 'em first off, and goes to chapel

during the sermon. You'd find some of 'em still going, if were outside. Ullbrig makes its haste to get out again b anybody else, and go home to dinner. As for bowing its towards the earth, Ullbrig only does that when it's ploug or singling turnips, or raking potatoes, or putting in ma That's Ullbrig's time to bow its head.

"But Moses had another time for that. He made h bowed his head toward the earth (didn't merely put his on the ledge of the pew, or into his hand, or over the ri his hat, but went right down toward the earth), and worshi That was Moses' way of doing things. But Ullbrig's lea better since then. Ha! that's because Moses never the advantage of chapel. What a different man Moses n have been if he'd only been brought up a Primitive, Wesleyan, or a Friend, or a Plymouth Brother, or a Ba or an Evangelist—plenty to choose from nowadays, you But we mustn't blame him because he hadn't our advant If only he'd lived in these days he might have been as p a worshipper as Nonconformity could wish for—possibly a deacon or a lay preacher. But Moses knew nothin Nonconformity. He knew God, that's all—if that's anyt to go by. Perhaps it isn't. He knew God, and God hono him by conversing with him—so the Book tells us—fac face, as a man to his friend. Now why, I wonder, didn't reprove him for his wickedness in casting himself face d wards in such idolatrous method of worship? Perhap we say in Ullbrig, He didn't think on. Perhaps He di Personally, my own opinion is (an opinion, by-the-by, up by Holy Church, of which, however, we know better tha take any notice) that not only did He think on, but that M would not have ventured the experiment a second time, it been disfavoured of Jehovah. In those days of humar childhood—when the world was in its infancy—our Di Parent was not sparing of the rod.

"Ha! Only during the past week, while I was in church of a brother cleric, I had a beautiful illustratio Mosaic idolatry. Not on Sunday, mark you, but on a w day—while Ullbrig here was busy with its harvest—a entered the church where I was sitting. And what do think he did as soon as he entered? Went out again, y say. No, he didn't go out again, even though he saw a p in one of the pews. He did what Moses did—made h and bowed his face toward the earth, and worshipped. T of it! A man in bicycling costume—a mere wayfare

passer-by—leaving his machine in order to enter the House of God and spend a few moments humbly with his Maker before proceeding on his journey. And be sure his Maker would not forget him—even in the small things. His tyres would keep no less inflated, and his screws would hold no less tightly for that little pause of prayer. He told me he liked praying; it seemed to do him good. Ha! think of that—a man's liking prayer because it seemed to do him good. I asked him if he had any particular object in his prayer—if he'd dropped his bell on the road, or had lost a bolt—but he said no; he was simply thanking God for the fine day and the fresh air, letting the Lord know he was grateful, and had not forgotten Him because he happened to be enjoying himself.

"Ha! glorious idolatry. Moses could hardly have done better. Fell on his knees and prayed. If a man were to walk into our Ullbrig places of worship and fall on his face, all the deacons would rush out upon him, and think he'd been seized with a fit, or were suffering from some alcoholic suffusion, and have him hustled out of doors again in a jiffy. No idolatry for Ullbrig!"

At times he quotes Thomas à Kempis and St. Augustine from the original, licking his tongue round the Latin with as much zest as a cat at the cream bowl, half a page at a quotation, saying:

"Ha! beautiful! beautiful! There it is, you see; as plain as a pikestaff for us. No mistaking it." And in the same genial, jingling fashion he warns us to take the lesson to ourselves, and not treat it as intended for the sinful, of whom, thank God, we're not one. "Ha!" says he, "let's take all this to heart, shall we?—to our own hearts; not to our neighbour's. Don't let's go away nodding gleefully to ourselves and saying: 'Ha! Mrs. So-and-So ought to have heard his Reverence this morning!' 'Ha! it's a pity old John, James, or William couldn't have heard the Vicar talking about them to-day in church!' Let's say to ourselves: 'It's me his Reverence means; nobody else. I'm the person that doesn't do like Moses. I'm the individual that doesn't make haste, bow my head toward the earth, and worship!'"

And even then such was the captivating impersonality of his Reverence's denunciations and exhortations that not a soul in the church (excepting Pam, perhaps; ah, yes, excepting always Pam) took the moral to himself; not even the Spawer.

Then the windows went yellow again, and the church seemed foundering in gloom—like a great ship sinking under

water—and the blotted faces turned all one way, and the shrubs shivered, and there was a distant rumbling of thunder. Plainly the rain was on them.

So, at least, his Reverence thought, and turned to the east and crossed himself in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and the congregation rose hurriedly with him, praying that the wet might hold back over the concluding hymn. But there was no concluding hymn.

"The Lord's been very good to us," his Reverence said instead, ". . . and kept off the rain beautifully so far; but now, since He's told us His intentions so plainly, it would be improvident to disregard them. The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with you now and evermore. Amen. Don't stay to put on your mackintoshes, or else you'll need them. Get off home while you can."

And so dismissed them, all except the Spawer — to whose presence he suddenly became, as for the first time, conscious, impaling him on his forefinger as he descended the pulpit steps—whence, also, he signalled the choir to disperse. "Cut along with you there; as quick as you can. Only don't tear your surplices." And to the verger, who had come bustling up the aisle in a tremendous hurry to catch his Reverence at the foot of the pulpit

CHAPTER LI

"Ha! this is beautiful of you," his Reverence said, enfolding the Spawer's hand in that warm, balmy, beneficent softness of palm, with the fang of the big gold signet quite concealed, by the lectern, and giving it a commendatory shake. "To come three miles on a morning like this for the sake of worshipping in the true Faith. Beautiful! beautiful! quite an example to our Ullbrig laggards. It'll be talked of. Ullbrig has only three yards to come . . . and it doesn't come those, as you see. When Ullbrig comes, look for the Millennium or port wine—generally port wine. There's no mistaking the symptoms. Mrs. So-and-So's liver's no better. Put on your best black dress and go to church this morning, Janie; a bottle of his Reverence's port would do her good. Take care and sit where he can see you and sing as loud as you can. Show him how capitally you can find all your places, and don't stare about you when he's preaching.

"Ha! Or Mrs. Somebody expects being confined any day now—she's not a fit figure to go to church. She's only fit to talk scandal at house-doors and publish her profile throughout the length and breadth of the High Street. Wash your face, Johnnie, and go to church this morning. It's time you did; you're growing too big a boy to stop at home as your father and mother do. They've done all their church-going before you were born or thought of. Ask his Reverence after service if there are any little jobs he'd like you to do for him, as your mother's likely to be ill again—her old complaint, tell him—and will be thankful for any bit of assistance or support. Ha!" Communing amiably with himself in this manner on the subject of Ullbrig's weaknesses, he led the way round the chancel to the little vestry, with its green iron safe and its dingy old writing-table—where some three or four centuries of dead-and-buried Ullbrig brides had registered themselves with unsteady pen—its caraffe of drinking water beneath inverted glass, its cocoa-nut matting, its surplice pegs, and the special long cupboard for his Reverence's vestments; and disrobed himself there. "Ha! that's our Ullbrig way. Go

to church to get something out of it if you can. 'His Reverence gets paid for preaching; we ought to get something for going. That's only fair.' See what his reverence the vicar's to put up with in a place like this. *Ex nihilo nihil fit.* That's our motto; which, being rendered according to Ullbrig theologians, means: Nothing done without good value given for it in return. If Nonconformity hadn't its tea-urns and its bath buns it wouldn't hold sway over Ullbrig another twenty-four hours. Plenty of hot tea and big bath buns, with plenty of flies and currants in 'em; that's the way to subjugate the heathen bucolic beast. Music's no good—any more than the Church. We're dogs with bad names to start with, both of us. Musicians are unscrupulous, dissipated vagabonds, such as you, that live by their wits, as everybody knows. Vicars of the Established Church are children of Satan and prophets of Baal. We're both in the same boat. And," said he, hanging up his cassock and picking up the dismembered mortar-board from its place by the water-bottle, ". . . this morning we shall have to swim for it. You can't go back to Cliff Wrangham in the teeth of a storm like this that's brewing."

"It's awfully good of you . . ." the Spawer began. "But really, I counted the risks when I came. I'm ready to take my chance."

"Ha! not a bit of it! not a bit of it!" his Reverence

close against the lower chink to oppose any intrusive swill of water, and did what they thought best in such cases as those where a diamond pane lacked in the leaded windows; removing the hassocks from below, and spreading a mouldy cushion or two to absorb the bulk of what wetness came through.

They had only just completed the last of their preparations when a vivid streak of lightning flashed in the yellow, murky air like a knife-blade, and seemed to rip up the great baggy canopy of water suspended above them at one slice. A roar of enraged thunder followed the deadly thrust, and the rain fell whizzing to earth next moment like arrows.

"Ha! here we are!" Father Mostyn said, sniffing this warfare of the elements with a jubilant nostril—like a prophet who has foretold disaster to the ungodly, and rejoices in the witness of their overthrow. "Just what I said. I knew we should get it. No mistaking the signs. Another hymn would have done us. Three short verses would have converted the house of prayer into a menagerie of caged beasts, smelling dinner, and no immediate prospect of it. Ha! come along. We'll make a bolt."

He gathered up his cassock in both hands as far as the knees, like a dowager who has lost all modesty concerning her legs, and screwing up his mouth and aiming a way for himself with one eye through the thick downpour to the Vicarage gate —but a dozen paces or so from the porch—ejected himself in a game dash for cover.

"Ay, see-ye! There comes 'is Rivrence," Mrs. Fussitter exclaimed, who had been promising herself—and her brother, Jarge Middleway—this little comedy for some minutes past, through the glass panes of the shop door (the blinds being religiously down in both windows). "Ah knowed very well 'e wor i'side choch, an' would 'ave to show 'issen soon or late. An' theer gans t' Spawer fro' Dixon's. Mah wod! They can run an' all, it seems, when there's need. See-ye! Mah wod! Would a body believe. Just look at that."

Mrs. Fussitter's use of the expressions "See" and "Look at that," were merely illustrative utterances, designed to show that she was speaking from actual observation—as her own vehement head filled every available inch of window space for the purpose of survey.

"Dud-dud-dud-dud!" said Jarge Middleway, making no attempt to claim any portion of the observatory (knowing the futility of it), but standing passively by the counter with his arms hanging and his face as impassive as a cold muffin.

"Why, ye know very well 'e isn't," his sister told him, somewhat testily. "Ow can ye talk such nonsense? Y'eeard for yessen what Mrs. Morland telt me."

"Dud-dud-dud!" Jarge Middleway said again, as impassively as before.

Nothing of him moved—not even his lips. It was only in getting up steam for utterance that he displayed any motion; in speech itself he stood as still as a wooden Scotchman.

"Ay, bud she didn't mean 'im," his sister said. ". . . Eh?"

"Dud-dud . . ."

"'Appen so, bud this rain'll mek a difference. See-ye, noo they're shekkin' their 'ats an' cawts (coats). What's yon i' 'all? Noo, theer! If ah didn't think so. They mun gan an' shut door just as ah wor getting a good look. Run back wi' ye into kitchen this minute. Don't y'eear them taties? Div ye want fender all of a red rust?"

"Ha! capital! capital!" his Reverence was saying at the other side of the closed, bruised, blistered, and by this time rain-soaked door, wiping the drops off his chin and nose-end, and running the handkerchief round the inner rim of his Roman collar. "That's one of the beauties of living by your own porch. The elements haven't any terrors for you. Its disadvantage is that his reverence can't show his nose round the crack of the door without some observer to take note of its colour. 'Ha! saw his Reverence's nose this morning. It

to know before you get back. His Reverence ran first with his head down and the cassock in his hands, and the Spawer was at his heels, holding his hat on, and pulling faces because the rain was in his eyes, and they wiped themselves down with handkerchiefs in the hall. Ha! that's it. Beautiful! beautiful! And there'd have been more to tell, only his Reverence thoughtlessly shut the door Just like his Reverence. Always doing unfriendly actions.

". . . Now. How's that? Shall I lend you a dry handkerchief? No? Come along, then; let's see what the larder can do for us. There'll be no getting back to Cliff Wrangham for you this side of lunch," and stamping his feet upon the flags to shake out the legs of his trousers, where he had rucked them over his shoes, he led the way into the sanctum sanctorum; so awful before the thought of Ullbrig, and so full for the Spawer with legends of bygone happiness.

A dual sense of gladness and sadness possessed him as he walked forward. Here he was very close to, and here he was very far from, the spirit of Pam. Out of every tile he trod on some brooding remembrance of the girl rose up as though his foot had dislodged it; wound about him like the sorrowing smoke from a funeral pyre and dissolved. In every corner of the room they entered, the spirit of the girl seemed to linger. But it was a chill, dead spirit, filling the place like the fumes of pallid tobacco, smoked by departed smokers long ago. All about the room were the visible tokens of the girl's presence—tokens so acute that to each of them his mind's eye supplied the absent figure of the girl as she had been at the actual moment of its accomplishment. Here she was stooping to straighten the antimacassar of a chair; here she was smoothing a cushion; here she was adjusting the objects on his Reverence's writing-table; here she was filling the champagne specimen glasses with water, against the light of the window—looking at the measured liquid with eyes no less clear; nipping off the stalks of the flowers disposed in them.

Beneath the forced smilingness of his face, how sick his heart was. Now that he had lost her, how he knew himself to love this girl. All these little evidences of her gentle presence he transposed, by a quick mental modulation, into another house—a house that should have been their own—his and hers. He saw her doing these things for him and for his sake. He saw her come to him at the piano, where he was setting all his love of her, and all the beauty of her, to music, and slide her two arms over his neck, and he, half

turning, clasped those treasured hands and held them, and their cheeks lay flat together; only from time to time disturbing themselves while their lips sought each other, and strained all the love of their two souls through the rapt filter of silence.

Ah! Pam, Pam, Pam! If he could have done as Moses did. If he could have made haste, and bowed his head to the earth, and worshipped—worshipped the flags you trod on . . . even lost to him as you were . . . his heart would have wished it. For now he knows what, racked on the torture of his own irresolution, his heart had almost ceased to know. Like a martyr for some holy cause, the throes of suffering obscured quite, at times, the cause for which he suffered. But now that the tension of the rack was over, and shaken and stretched and trembling, he was released, he knew—knew that she was the one girl whose soul was twin to his own—the one girl who could have rounded off his life, and filled all his days to their brim with the measure of spiritual content. And instead, she was marrying a pair of bell-bottomed trousers—a pair of shoddy-made, bell-bottomed trousers like the extinguisher of a candle.

Oh! Pam, Pam, Pam! What was she thinking of?

Whatever was she thinking of . . . to marry those?

And because the Spawer's heart was full to exclusion of the girl, they did not touch upon Pam first of all. Whenever they drew near upon the girl in conversation—or he thought they

his word hangs in doubt he just goes and drums up his lordship cousin. Ha! that soon settles matters. Doesn't go canvassing about the place as I do—trying to persuade John, James, or William, that the Church is the true faith. Wouldn't dream of it. Isn't a commercial traveller, trying to book orders for salvation, with a liberal commission allowed for cash. The salvation's provided there for 'em, and they've got to have it. Good gracious! I daren't let him know to what extent I humour 'em here. Depend upon it, if he knew that I sat in cottages—didn't merely hammer at the doors with the stag-horn handle of a riding-crop while my horse stood on their step, and shouted at 'em when they opened to me as though they were deaf—but actually went inside and sat down and demeaned myself to listen to 'em . . . why, I should lose my bit of pike-fishing for ever. As for telling him such cases as Friend Sheppardman Stevens—if he got to know that, he'd report me to the Bishop in two-twos. Not a doubt about it. He'd have me reported for one in open alliance with heresy and a proclaimed enemy to the Church. Ha!" His Reverence screwed his mouth and took his nose between thumb and finger, drawing them persuasively downward and off his chin in the way that conjurers evoke pennies. He did not evoke any penny that the Spawer could see, but his eye brightened as though he had, and his shoulders commenced to wag for more congenial topic. "And the music?" he said, putting first one toe and then another from beneath the hem of his cassock, and drawing them backward in his amiable waltz step. "Ha! that's the only thing I missed. If it had been my pipe I couldn't have felt more lost without it. You wouldn't believe. All the time after dinner I've kept going about with the sort of feeling . . . I don't know how to express it . . . as though something were missing, or I'd forgotten something. Sometimes I got the impression that I wasn't quite dressed—that I'd forgotten to put my trousers on, or a collar, or something . . . and then suddenly I remembered. Ha! the music, of course. No mistaking the symptoms. The music. Unfortunately . . . where I was, he has no more regard for music or appreciation of it than the man in the moon."

(. . . The man in the moon! The man in the moon! Why was it that the old time-worn phrase seemed to strike the Spawer so forcibly?)

". . . Not a bit of it. That's the one point of cleavage in our friendship. His idea of musicians doesn't carry him beyond church organists. As for discussing it apart from its

ecclesiastical setting, you might as well engage him in conversation on the home-life of the bellringer. I confess it to his shame. If I were to introduce the topic of music . . . Mozart, Beethoven, Cherubini . . . *Allegretto con fuoco* . . . *tempo giusto* . . . *da capo al fine, contra punctum*, and so forth . . . at the dinner-table, he'd look at me to make sure I hadn't overstepped the decanter. He'd sooner suspect me of drinking than of sympathy with such reprehensible pastimes."

All the while his Reverence was making excursions to various corners of the storm-darkened room; opened the cupboard door and plunged his hands with a rattle into a hidden knife basket; tried the blades on his thumb, and sprang them critically against his palm for selection; jingled amid silver forks, and counted them to his requirements, large and small; brought forth glasses, tumblers and wine glasses, and liqueur; then casters and bottled condiments; plates and napery, and laying them on the far end of the big dining-table, cleared that space near the window for their ultimate disposal.

"Ha! let's see . . . one, two . . . did I bring the forks? To be sure. What am I thinking of? Capital! capital! I've been so long in other people's clover, you see, that I'm forgetting how to graze on my own meagre grassland. Ha! that's better—and the salt. Well! and what's the concerto been doing all this time? Made headway, has it?"

He picked open a folded table-cloth by its two corners, and

scrupulously down all its creases and over the corners of the table.

What did that oracular "Hà!" mean? Did it mean that his Reverence knew the whole history of those two times—or suspected it? . . . or knew nothing; suspected nothing? There are moments when an ambiguous monosyllable is more potent than the wisest of words—and this was one of them. The Spawer waited a little space, while his Reverence passed his smooth palm backwards and forwards over the snowy surface, in the hopes that he might add something to that unexplanatory "Ha!" But his Reverence said nothing. He might have been waiting too.

"I've heard, though . . ." the Spawer began, feeling the discomfort of that monosyllable like a drop of cold water down his neck, and stopped there suggestively.

"Ha!" His Reverence passed a concluding hand over the table-cloth, and straightened himself with puckered mouth and portentous brows. ". . . Unfortunately true. Unfortunately true. Yes . . . Ullbrig has an unpleasant habit of speaking the truth at the wrong time."

"Unfortunately" true! The Spawer's foundering heart clutched despicably at that token of his Reverence's disfavour, as though it had been the floating straw. The Vicar, then, was his ally. "Who is on my side, who?" a voice inside him seemed calling exultantly. He was afraid his Reverence might hear it.

". . . At first," he said, professing suddenly that the destiny of two drops, trickling slowly towards each other on the window-pane, was of more moment to him than the matter of the girl, ". . . at first . . . I hardly believed it. I suppose, though . . . you say there's no mistake."

His Reverence shook his head, and passed over to the cupboard again.

"A very great mistake," he said, stooping on one knee and speaking into the cavernous recesses of the shelves; and after a moment: "A very great mistake," he said again, with his face withdrawn and voice at its normal—like an echo of the first. "I'm not surprised at your incredulity. Of course, being ignorant of circumstances, you've nothing but your judgment to guide you—and plainly judgment would lead you to pronounce against such a form of proceeding. Yes!" He raised himself from the floor with the twisted face for a rheumatic twinge in his knee, and returned once more to his table preparations. "I must admit that the girl has

disappointed me. Of course . . . ever since the beginn
as Ullbrig will tell you if you care to pay it the compl
of asking (which I don't suppose you will)—this has b
contingency to reckon with. But I'd hoped. You see
it's different. Things latterly had looked so favourable
thought the musical experiment was likely to succeed.
and the French too. Yes, yes; the French too. It see
to have stimulated the girl to aspirations altogether bey
Ullbrig. Indeed, I'll admit frankly that I thought this
business was killed as dead as a door-nail. I thought w
trained her palate to require daintier food in every resp
than Ullbrig could give her. And then . . . all at once . .
to be beaten on the post. Of course"—he drew attentio
to what followed with a quiet gesture, as though it were reall
quite obvious enough without the superfluous emphasis o
pointing out—". . . it would be quite possible for me t
forbid the thing—veto it completely and put a stop to it once
for all. But then . . ." he screwed up his mouth for a
moment's reconsideration of what such an act would effect,
"for the present I haven't quite found my justification for this
extreme measure. To control proceedings is one matter—
that, of course, I shall do—but to institute them is another.
If I had meant to set my face resolutely against the business,
it should have been done from the first."

"It has been going on, then," the Sp
". . . for some time?"
"Ha! don't

dealer—Knaresbro' way, I believe. Yes; depend upon it, that's what he was. Of course, in greengrocering circles . . . there's no stigma attaching to that. It is, I should imagine, as little open to question as . . . as any small trade can ever be. Greengroceries, I suppose, may be looked upon as a necessary evil—especially when not vended fresh. (You'd see the recent case of vegetable poisoning in Hunmouth, no doubt.) From many points of view, however, this schoolmaster—Frewin by name—is not the man I should have wished for Pam—indeed, far from being the man I should have imagined her to wish for herself. In addition to noticeable shortcomings of feature and bearing, his manner does not prepossess anybody the least in his favour. He has a rather objectionable constraint in speaking, as though he were curbing himself against the impulse to let his temper loose and say something unpleasant; the sort of man, if you can understand me, who, having no dignity of his own either by birth or station, is always standing upon it. Moreover, he's not young—some years in advance of Pam's age, as a matter of fact. Not that that need constitute itself a disability *per se*, but in conjunction with other shortcomings, it is certainly to be deplored. And then, again, he is a man of schismatic beliefs—a member of the Wesleyan choir and an active sower of the seeds of heresy. It's quite true that he has from time to time thrown out feelers respecting conversion to the Established Church, but knowing the true source of the movement, I have hitherto done nothing to encourage it. However, in the light of present circumstances, it seems that we shall have to count upon him as a member of our congregation henceforth. He was there this morning, I saw. In future we'll have him out of the organ loft, however. There is no musical excuse for his presence up there; and indeed, the example would be pernicious.

"Of course, under ordinary circumstances, I should have had no alternative but to nip the whole affair in the bud; pack Pam away, if need be, and arrange meanwhile for the fellow to be transplanted in some peculiarly far and foreign soil. But as it is . . . that seems an unnecessary setting of the mills to grind without grist. If we stop this marriage . . ." His eye roamed over the table, where knives and forks and spoons and plates and glasses commenced to array themselves with a semblance of order beneath his fingers. The Spawer's eye shifted, as a meeting seemed imminent. ". . . Perhaps, when I'm dead and gone, she may contract a worse. Situated

as she is, without friends or society, we can't hope to place her in life as by right and reason she should be placed. Perhaps, if one could only finance the girl, and secure fashionable influence for her, and float her upon the social sea, she might repay the investment cent for cent. But on the other hand . . . there's always a fear. Knowing nothing of the temptations of society life, she might fall to the first barrel like a lame pigeon. Besides, the girl shows no hankerings after the flesh-pots. There's not a pinch of mundane salt in her nature. So why apply it with one's own fingers, and spoil her in the seasoning? Ha! why indeed? Therefore, as things stand, she must be sacrificed. This man wants her and she wants him—more strongly than even I'd supposed—and when all's said and done, we might only make worse of it if we tried to twist human nature to our own preconcerted theories. At least, the fellow has no positive vices—they are mostly negative. He is steady, sober, respectable; a hard worker, likely—so far as one can foresee—to provide the girl with a certain home for life. For an indefinite period they may remain at Ullbrig, where—except for those inevitable little disturbances which we may expect under conditions of matrimony—her existence will be but slightly changed. Of course, she will have to relinquish her postal duties, but her parochial work will suffer no modification.

into the larder for me—knowing I should be back too late to lay in stock for Sunday. Ha! dear girl. Why in the world couldn't she think as beautifully for herself as she does for others? And here's his reverence's brown loaf, and some beet, and some herring olives. Come, come! We shan't do so badly."

"You only got back last night?" the Spawer inquired, with a desperate struggle to impart an inflection of interest to the question.

"Ha! last night only," his Reverence rejoined, dispersing his various acquisitions about the table. "Came along with Friend Tankard from Hunmouth. Poor Friend Tankard! I think he gets slower and slower. Some day, mark my words, he'll set out from Hunmouth, and never reach Ullbrig at all. That'll be the end of him. However, he did just manage to pull us through this time, and for the rest of the evening I was interviewing our errant sister. But she stood firm. I tried to shake her on all points; had her in tears even. Yes, poor girl, had her in tears. She rained copiously, but it only seemed to water the roots of her resolve. She used the tears of my making to beg to me with. Ha! Let's see . . . to be sure! The beer. You're a beer man, at least, aren't you? —even though you stop short of whisky. Capital! capital! I'm going to offer you a little speciality of my own. It's a local beer—not Ullbriggian, by the way—but from the district, and you'll say you never tasted its equal. Foams like champagne and bites like a nettle. Mild withal."

He disappeared from sight on this new errand, and returned, after a remote sound of clinking, with half-a-dozen bottles of his speciality, three by the neck in each hand.

"Ha! here we are! If the light weren't so bad, I'd ask you to examine the colour. But that's no use. We'll let that go, and judge by the taste alone. . . . And so—" By a skilful intonation he cleared his voice of the beer, and skipped back to the old topic where they had been before. ". . . In the end we allowed the matter to stand, and deferred judgment."

"And they will be married. . ." the Spawer began.

He was thankful beyond measure that the Vicar picked him up without delay, for his voice went suddenly as husky as bran.

"Ha! not yet! not yet!" his Reverence said. "That's quite another thing. Though, for that matter, the girl wished to prevail over my scruples even there, and persuade me to an actual date and definite consent. But no. They must

possess their souls in patience until I've had opportunity to study them under these new conditions. I'm prepared to let her go, since her happiness requires it, but I'm not going to throw her. Besides . . . a little object lesson of this kind appeared to me desirable. As I pointed out to Pam, the man's conduct in the matter left much to be desired. Had he been possessed of the natural instincts of a gentleman he would have approached me first, before intruding himself upon the girl's affections."

"Of course," the Spawer acquiesced hurriedly.

He loathed himself for a cowardly renegade as he did so, but the priest's eye, to his guilty vision, fixed him with such a meaning glance of severity that he felt anything short of verbal agreement would betray him.

"Of course," Father Mostyn repeated, with renewed emphasis. "The proper way—indeed, the only way for a gentleman—would have been to approach me in the first instance, and receive my sanction before unsettling the girl with a suit which subsequent events might prove to be undesirable. But there, of course, you have the man, unfortunately. I daresay his nature would be quite unable to appreciate the niceness of the point—even if you explained it to him. Now you and I"—here the terrible condemnatory look seemed to be fixed on the Spawer again—"know these

CHAPTER LII

AND now, thinks the Spawer, with fine egoism of wounded love, there is not in the whole world a heart so heavy as his.

But he is wrong, for here in Ullbrig hangs a heavier.

In the intermittent fevers of his passion he needed to nurture no angers against the girl. Did he but know it, as well might he trample in scorn upon the poor, feelingless petals of a storm-dashed lily, as tread down her remembrance beneath the cruel heel of his pride. It required not, as the facts were, that he should try to pilfer back, by mean acts of petty larceny—little sneaking thefts of calumny and contempt, that he knew were despicable while he did them—some sort of moral restitution from the girl's character for the happiness of which he considered she had plundered him; deeming her own store of happiness to be enriched, in some way, by the spoils of his. For, wherever his pillaged happiness was gone to, it was not with the girl. If, as a kind of biting poultice to his own wrong-doing, the Spawer tried to imagine that the girl had sinned against him, Heaven knows she had sinned in a hard market, and bought her iniquity dear. Other people, worldly people of experience and sagacity, know how to obtain all their sins below par, at the expense of the widow and orphaned. Pam, knowing nothing of this moral stock-and-share market, was paying for her shares with everything that she possessed. To the last penny of her self-respect she was paying for them. Of all moral and conscientious coinage she was void and bankrupt. There was nothing left her now but the body she lived in—all its beautiful furnishment of soul had been distrained and bundled out by the bailiffs long ago. And the body was mortgaged.

For this marriage—that to the Spawer looked but a callous flaunting of her bliss before his stricken eyes, a cruel demonstration of how little she was dependent upon him for any share of her happiness in life—what was it but a foreclosure? She who had preached the gospel of true love, of the necessary unity of the body and the soul in marriage; who had proclaimed to Ginger that "there must be no chance

about it, Ginger! . ." she who above all girls knew a love as free of carnality as any earthly love can be—she was selling her body now for its price.

Oh, the shame of it! the shame of it! Pam's body sold at the price of a theft.

Would she ever forget the night of horror that saw the compact made. The lonely, dusty highroad to Hunmouth, with its wide grass borders sloping down to the ditch bottoms, between the trimmed, stunted hedgerows, where the schoolmaster led her; the rising moon; the sickly, suffocating mist of harvest; the dim stars. And there, backward and forward over the powdery road, she had fought that last fateful fight for her soul's freedom—and failed.

Give her the letter back . . . only give her the letter back . . . and she would try to love him in earnest. She would force herself to love him. This time she should not fail. Give her the letter back. It was not his; it was not hers. Come with her himself if he doubted, and see her hand it in at Dixon's door. She swore she would give it. He did not understand. It had been all a mistake. She had not meant to take it. If he only knew the horror she had felt of herself. Oh, she promised! she promised!

But the man would have no promises. She had made him promises before and broken them. Here was the letter—here in his possession—and here it should remain, for witness

Grim comedy of love!—the first comedy ever written, and the last to be played on that dread night when this world's curtain shall be rung down. Here are two beings going fast to perdition for each other, and exercising every effort that no sign shall be given to check the descent. Here is a man, filled with the delirium of an arrested passion as with a nightmare, reproaching the girl bitterly in his heart because she has no heed to his pain during this hour of her happiness. And here is a girl, whose love of the man is so great that she would die rather than let him know it—each thinking the other sufficient unto himself, each reading the other as the other would be read, and no benignant divinity to intervene and check disaster.

And so the course of the comedy proceeds, and the girl, sick unto death with loathings, played her appointed part. The rain came, and from the bottom of her heart she thanked God for it. It was a strange thing to be thankful for. Once upon a time—that clarid time of bliss when a soul had resided in her—she would have been the concentrated receptacle of Ullbrig's hopes and fears. Every raindrop that fell against the pane would have had its anguished counterpart inside her. All these rotting crops she would have wept over in spirit, as though they had been death-beds. But now it was not so. Let rain come and destroy the harvest. Let pestilence fall upon Ullbrig. Let everything happen whose happening could be a cloak to her misery, and conceal it from public gaze. Each hour of sunshine was fraught with chances that she might encounter the Spawer; each chance encounter would give her a century for betrayal. If so might be, let him go now without even as much between them as the word farewell.

But the letter! Till he got that . . . he would not go at all. The longer its restitution was delayed, the longer must she endure her agony.

Strange reversal of misery. In the beginning she had suffered with the sickness of his going. Now, in the end, she suffered doubly with the sickness that he should stay. Of a truth, she was snared in her own wicked net. The sin that she had committed against him was turned into an all-sufficing punishment more than meet for the offence. And when would she be able to ease her pain in delivering the letter?

She did not know. Since that night of shameful surrender no further mention of the letter had passed between these two

guilty partners, and because of the cruel mercy at which this man held her she would ask him nothing. To appeal to him respecting his intentions respecting her—to inquire of my lord's pleasure, as though she were a bond slave, purchased with gold . . . no, no, she could not! When he deemed the time ripe to return her his ill-gotten seal of authority—once it had stamped the bond to his service—let him do so, and she would take it. Till then, let them both keep silence respecting their compact.

Hardly a word, indeed, passed between them on any topic. They had no stomach, either of them, it seemed, to bury their shame beneath the dead leaves of verbiage. In silence only they communed, and rendered subscription to the bond. And by trifling, wordless actions the schoolmaster tightened his hold upon the girl's shrinking muscles, and held her to him as in a vice. Mere little attentions of courtesy they were, for the most part, that the household regarded—and kept watch for—with significant looks to one another, seeing in them the pleasant ripples on the seductive surface of true love—but to the girl they were but bolts being driven home, one by one, into the padlocked door of her prison. For she was this man's prisoner in thought, word, and deed. Whenever she moved, he moved with her. If she hid herself from him in her bedroom, be sure he was keeping safe guard over its door from his own. If she changed rooms, he was after her like thought. In all except

escape. There were letters for Ullbrig during those days of rain, and he proffered to take them in the girl's stead. With a rain like that there was nothing to be feared. But the girl would not. To his cruelty she had had to submit, but to his kindness never. So they went, the two of them—for though he could venture to leave her behind, he dared not be the one left—battling through the downpour beneath mackintoshes and umbrellas, with their heads down, the whole roadway apart, exchanging never a word. And Ullbrig, safe at home, behind its starched curtains, saw the letters come thus, and smiled.

Truly, many waters cannot quench love.

Sunday—that never-to-be-forgotten Sunday, that seemed like the climax of the girl's shame, when to her horror she had found the Spawer in his pew beneath her; bless Heaven for the timely storm that kept them apart—Sunday came and went.

Monday replaced it; a promiseful, rainless day. All the sky was heaped up with great broken masses of cloud from yesterday's storm, that a persistent warm breeze swept over the cliff edge and across the sea, in ceaseless waves of sunlight and shadow. Throughout the day figures were moving about the fields, turning the limp and soddened sheaves to catch the wind. Still the breeze blew, and the countless host of clouds —like another Exodus of the Children of Israel—passed steadily over the land from the west to the east; to the brink of the sea and beyond. By evening they were nearly all gone over. Only detached bands of them here and there rode up silently from the great west, as though they had been horsemen of a rear guard, and moved slowly across the sky in the wake of that mighty passage. And as the last of these departed, the sun, like a great priest garbed in glorious gold vestments, rose to his height on the far horizon with arms extended to heaven, and pronounced a benediction over the land.

Rest in peace now, oh, Ullbrig farmers! Have no fear, oh, faint-hearted tillers of the soil! Rejoice, ye harvesters, for the Lord God of the harvest-field is come into His own again. The corn shall ripen in the ear; there shall be reaping, binding, and gleaning, and an abundant return for all your labours.

That same night, while the land lay still under the sacred hush of that benediction, in the little front parlour, all flushed glorious with the exultation of the sun's message, the schoolmaster returned to Pam what, on just such an evening as this —millions of ages ago, in some remote epoch of the world's history—he had taken from her.

Not a word accompanied the restoration. In silence the girl's hand went forth—with not even her own eyes watching its shameful errand—to meet it and receive that precious, hateful pawn that she was redeeming with her body. For some seconds they stood, maintaining their respective attitudes in that surreptitious transfer; the man with bent head and averted gaze as he had given; the girl with high, rebellious bosom for a great grief, and her chin shrinking in the nest of it, while the recipient hand at the back of her worked slowly downward in the depths of her skirt-pocket.

Then suddenly, before the man had time to realise or utter the words his mind was slowly coining, the girl's high breast fell in the convulsion of silent sobs. With both hands pressed to her cheeks, and the tears streaming fast through her spread fingers, she brushed abruptly by him.

At the door, for he had something to say, he spoke her name and laid a restraining hand upon her shoulder, but she shook it off with the hateful shudder for a serpent, and passed swiftly from him up the Sunday staircase.

CHAPTER LIII

ALL throughout the rest of that evening the schoolmaster had employment in guarding Pam's bedroom door. At times, drawing long breaths to suffocate his beating heart, he listened at its keyhole, applied his eye even, pressed his hot face flat against the woodwork, and strove to elicit some filterings, however attenuated, of its occupant and her concerns.

But the door was as uncommunicative as a gravestone. Had he not seen the girl go in, and heard her close the lock upon her entombment, he would have been sick with apprehension and doubt; ready to believe that she had eluded him, and that he had lost her. More than once, as it was, he tapped at the door, but no response came to him, and he was fearful to intensify the summons lest he might betray his presence to those downstairs, and bring about an enforced relinquishment of his watch.

Evening gave place to night, and the yellow harvest moon arose. Sounds of supper things stirring and searches after Pam drove him from the landing into his bedroom. Emma Morland, less timorous of knuckle than he, and less furtive of intention, came boldly up the staircase, calling Pam's name, and rapped—after finding the door locked—a peremptory summons upon its inmate.

"Come; what 'a ye gotten door fast for?" he heard her demand of the languid voice of response that had raised itself faintly at the summons, like a wounded bird. "Isn't it about time ye came doon an' gied a 'and wi' supper things? Ah've yon blouse to finish by to-neet, think on."

Then the wounded voice stirred itself wearily again.

"What! another?" Emma Morland cried, with more of resentment in her tones than sympathy. "That meks second ye've 'ad i' t' week. Ye nivver used to 'ave 'em. What's comin' tiv ye?"

"Well! ah declare!" she exclaimed, after further parley of an apparently incomprehensible and unsatisfactory nature. "It's a rum un when a lass like you starts tekkin' tiv 'er bed, 'at's nivver knowed a day's illness in 'er life! There mun be

seummut wrong wi' ye, ah think—a decline, or seummut o' t' sort. We s'll 'a to be fetchin' doctor tiv ye, gen ye get onny wuss. 'Ave ye onny bile wi it? Eh? Will ye 'ave some salts? Well, shall ah gie ye one o' them Dr. Ephraim Daly's blood an' stomach pills o' mine, an' then, if ye've onny bile ye'll know quick. Y'ought to 'ave seummut, onny road. Them's as good as owt ah can think on. Starvin's no sort o' way for a lass to doctor 'ersen. Y'eat nowt as it is. That's road Bateman' lass went before she died.

"Will ye let me mek ye some bread-an'-milk? Some gruel, then? Some tawst (toast) an' tea? Ye weean't? Ye're sure . . . noo? Well, then; it's no use. Ah've done my best. Good-neet tiv ye, an' ah 'ope ye'll be better i' t' morn. Don't trouble aboot gettin' up no sooner nor ye feel fit. 'Appen ye'll sleep it off."

So she was safe in bed, then. Through the sorrow his love felt at the unhappiness in which it had involved the girl—for love it was—nothing short of love, and great love at that, could have moved this nervous, self-secluded man to such courageous acts of infamy—he drew relieved breath at the intelligence. Now he could relinquish the closeness of his vigil without fear.

He would have followed Emma Morland down the staircase with less ease of mind, perhaps, could he have seen the dressed figure of the girl, curled up on the quilt, with her face

to rob her of this dear fruit of her wickedness now, and through fire and water she would be dragged rather than cede it.

This night must her purpose be glorified. This very night, while the household slept, she should steal forth—as she had stolen forth in that first early dawn of her happiness—and make restitution of the letter. Under the door by the porch, or in at that familiar window—if only it were left unfastened—she should slip it. And with this letter must go a second—that she would write—making full confession of the offence, and humbling herself before him for his pardon and forgiveness. No longer did she desire to be clad in his presence with the garments of hypocrisy. Let him look upon her in the nakedness of her sin, for her soul's true chastening. Let nothing be hid from him. Rather now his proper scorn and loathing than his ill-gotten favour, as her unrighteousness had once sought to retain it. For his favour was no more hers, at this time, than the letter she held. Both had been gained by hypocrisy and fraud. Both must be restituted for the completion of her atonement.

And then her soul, walking forward with face glorious, saw the atonement done . . . and passed beyond . . . and stopped.

After the atonement. . . . What?

Lord have mercy on her! What?

Should she come back to this house, return to this bed, go on living this life of shame and dishonour, give herself ultimately into the arms of this man? Should she celebrate the sacrament of atonement this night, only to enter upon a fresh course of unrighteousness to-morrow?

Oh, no, no, no! She could not. A thousand times no! She could not.

By fraud he had got her. By cruelty he had broken her resistance. If she were going to pay openly for her sin, by just atonement before the proper tribunal, why need she pay a hundredfold in secret to this unrighteous extortioner? What she had undertaken to do she had done. She had bound herself by no promises, for he would not accept them from her. She had tied herself to him publicly, and pled with Father Mostyn as though she had been pleading for her life's blood; had submitted to the degradation of this man's authority . . . only for the letter that she held. Rather than give herself up to him she would cast herself over the cliff and seek refuge in death.

And so thought ran on with her, and the further it travelled the further it seemed to take her away from the scene of her guilt and the dark man who had wronged her. Already, in the girl's distracted imagination, some fertilising seed of her own shame had been blown like pollen about the district by secret and communicative winds. She was no longer regarded as once she had been regarded; eyes everywhere were sterner; lips curled with barely repressed scorn, or spake hard in the utterance. Sooner or later this thing that she had borne such sufferings to guard would be surely breathed abroad. Murder would out. The very marriage, that had been undertaken as a concealment, would act in the end as a betrayal. Proof of her lovelessness would soon be known. Not much longer could her soul stagger on under its weighty chains and fetters, and give no cry. And since it must inevitably come, this culmination, why should she stay to witness it with her own eyes? She had strength for much, but not that. She would go.

Yes, slowly but surely—as though, all along, it had been aware of its destination, and kept it only from the girl herself—her mind, travelling over its miles and miles of railed purpose, arrived at this dark terminus. She would go.

She wept when she saw at last where it was she must alight, and said good-bye to herself as to a dear friend. But the parting was inevitable, and weeping, she bowed to it. To pour

dressmaker; as a cook; as a clerk in some other post office; as a secretary . . . as God knows what.

Ah! Pam, Pam! Could she have seen those thousands of other sisters of hers—that had gone just so, some of them—lining the big streets of our great cities, and bartering in the pitiable merchandise of their bodies . . . she might have hesitated before this last step. The life of Ullbrig—compared with the swift, deadly river of existence, full of cruel currents and swirling, treacherous eddies—was a mere placid mill-pond, unruffled and dangerless. But she was unaware.

Night drew on as she fashioned her plans. One by one the familiar sounds acquainted her exactly with the progress of it. In the darkness of her pillow, before the moon got round to her window, she needed no clock. She heard the clatter of pottery; "good-nights" exchanged in the kitchen; creaking of the twisted staircase to the postmaster's stockinged feet, with the hollow bump of his hands as he steadied his ascent; the amiable gasping of Mrs. Morland, gathering up her fore-petticoats and labouring in the wake of her husband's ascent; the unutterable sound of the schoolmaster's footsteps, that sent pangs through her, each one, as though he were treading all the way on her heart; the cruel catch of his bedroom door, so hard, remorseless, and sinister. In such wise he had shut the door of his compassion on her soul's fingers, and heeded not. And last of all, the sounds of bolts shot beneath; journeyings of Emma to and fro between the two kitchens. Now she would be extinguishing the lamp; now she would be lighting her candle; now she would be putting the kitchen lamp back for safety on the dresser by the wall; now she would be coming upstairs . . . ah! here she came. The flickers of her candle winked momentarily in the keyhole of Pam's door, as though she were listening at the head of the staircase to gather assurance of her sound repose. Then the keyhole closed its blinking eye, and there ensued the click of Emma's own latch.

At that last culminating sound, Pam's heart turned palpitatingly within her, part exultant, part terrified; seemed almost to come into her mouth like a solid materialised sob. Now all the path was clear. Its clearness dismayed her. Soon slumber would prevail over the Post-house, and act sentinel to her purpose. But though purpose, standing like a bather by the brink of wintry waters, shivered at the prospect of immersion—yet it did not falter. Purpose had vowed to go, and purpose was going. Another hour the girl kept stillness upon her bed, and the half of an hour after that, listening until the rhythmic

ronflement of the postmaster's snore was established, and the intervals between that horrible menaceful cough — short at first—had spaced themselves out into ultimate silence. Then from her bed she rose.

Stealthily, seated on the side of it, she unlaced her shoes and laid them on the quilt, that her feet might be noiseless upon the floor. Then, letting the weight of her body slide gradually on to the rug by the side of her bed, she moved forward, balancing for even pressure of tread with outstretched hands. The clear beams of the moon filled her white bedroom by this time, as though it were day. There was no need of any other light than this. And now that the actual moment of flight was upon her, its keen, constricted space in eternity acted like a pin-hole lens, through which, magnified, she saw the difficulties of her task.

What, in the nature of personalty, should go with her? She would have need of her bath, of her big sponge, of her tooth-brushes, of her dentifrice and powder, of her brushes and comb, of her night-gowns, of her dressing-gown, of changes of underlinen, of her blouses, of her best dress, of her Sunday shoes, of her walking boots, of pocket-handkerchiefs . . . these only concerning her toilette.

And she would have need of her mother's books, and her own little library; her own little stock of French grammars and easy reading books; the music that he had given her . . . heaps

of her purpose, like a child weeping its way to school, that never dreams of contesting the destiny that drives it there.

Yes; all these dear things of her affection must be left behind. For the present, at least. But they were not robbers in this house; they were honest people, who had loved her in the past, and been kind to her. They would guard these things for her, and if some day she wrote to them and asked as much, they would cede them to her without demur. Only what she positively needed must she take with her. A night-dress, her tooth-brushes, her sponge (that, at least, would squeeze up), a collar or two, some stockings, one change of linen, one brush and comb, one extra pair of shoes. Just such a parcel as she could carry without causing too much fatigue to herself, or too much comment from others. And she would need money.

How much had she?

In her purse she had four shillings, sixpence, and coppers; in the pocket of her old serge skirt, three halfpence. Five shillings odd to face the world with. Oh, it was very little!

But in an old chocolate-box she had one pound ten shillings in gold, and a fat five-shilling piece—all her recent savings; the proceeds of little works for his Reverence, and dressmaking assistance for Emma. Some of this had been solemnly dedicated for a present to Emma for her next birthday. The dedication had been in heart only, and Emma had no knowledge of it—except inasmuch as Pam had never let one of her birthdays pass by yet without sinking some of her hard-earned money in its remembrance. But this time it couldn't be helped. Her heart bled as she forked up this coined goodness of resolution—it seemed almost as though it were her soul that she had cashed into money and was about to spend—and slipped it, paper-swathed as it was, into the depths of her guilty back pocket, by the side of that other guilty possession. Then, from various parts of her bedroom, she gathered all the items necessary for her outfit—or with which it could provide her—and essayed upon her most terrible enterprise of all—the descent of the staircase.

Slowly, slowly, slowly . . . oh, agonisingly slowly . . . she turned the handle of her door and opened it upon its hinges. In those early days she had done this same thing—with trepidation, indeed, and compression of lip—but never with the blanched horror of to-night. To stumble now, or betray herself; to arouse the house to her flight, and be caught disgracefully in the act—with nothing but shame and exposure as recompense for her anguish—that must not be.

And yet all the boards cried out upon her, sprang up, as though she had startled them sleeping, and called: "Pam! Pam! What! is it you? Where are you going, Pam?" And she dared not hush them.

And the wooden walls, when she laid a guiding hand upon them, rocked and yielded to her weight; it seemed they must inevitably shake the sleepers on their beds. And the stairs—treacherous stairs—each one of them tried to betray her; promised fair to her foot, and called out when she confided them her body: "Noo then; noo then! where's ti gannin' to this time o' neet? Mester Morland! Mester Frewin! y' ought to be stirrin' alive noo! There's this lass o' yours away seumweers wi' a bundle o' claws (clothes)." Oh, the slow sickness of it; step by step, foot by foot, stop by stop, rigid as a statue, cold of heart as of clay, burning of head, tingling of ears. But at last her feet found the friendly kitchen mat, solid on the red-tiled floor.

Long, standing there, she listened, panting with the liberated accumulation of her breathing, and sifting the overheard silence for the slightest sound that might betide discovery of her flight. But none could she catch, though the meshes of her hearing were drawn painfully fine. The worst of her task was over. Now were only a few concluding things to do . . . and then the going.

The moon filled the little clean kitchen and the kitchen

all that had showed it kindness. To everybody that had given her a good word or a bad she felt the desire to leave a little epistolary farewell. But she could not write to them all. She saw it for herself. To do so would be to keep her hand at work with the pen till daybreak, and now every moment was of importance. Ullbrig would be early abroad to-morrow. Eyes would be scanning the earth from every quarter long before sunrise. Not the most that her heart wished to do now, but the least, for her purpose, that it might, must be her rule. She would write to the Spawer; he, at least, must be written to. And to Father Mostyn, and to the schoolmaster, and to Emma — just a word to Emma.

So deciding, she got pen and paper and ink, and set herself to this final task in the broad white band of moonlight over the window table.

With writhings, with fresh tears, with bitings of the pen, with painful defections of attention to the regions upstairs, in the flood of clarid moonlight, she coped with her labour. But at last that too, like all suffering in the world, had an end. The letter was written and sealed. And next, more fluently, was penned the epistle for his Reverence; and succeeding that, her farewell to the schoolmaster; and her sorrowing penitence to Emma. The first two she gathered to herself; the second two she left, displayed on the table, to be found of their respective addressees in the morning.

And now she was on the brink of departure. All her work in this house had been accomplished except the mere leaving of it. She had looked upon this as easy, by comparison, but how truly hard it was. Dear little kitchen, that swam away from her eyes as she gazed upon it—like a running stream under the moonlight. So the glad current of her past was racing from her. Dear little blurred dresser—friend of hers from her childhood upward. She stooped her lips to it on an impulse, and kissed its hard, scarred cheek again and again, in one last sacred farewell. Never more, perhaps, should her eyes rest upon it. Dear little warm-hearted oven, that had done her so many good turns in the past. Sometimes, perhaps, it might have been a little too short with her tarts, and a shade crusty with her pies—a little hot-tempered with herself even, but that was nothing. What were its faults by the side of hers! She held its round, bright knob in a lingering grasp. "Good-bye, little oven. . . . Oh, little oven, good-bye! Do your duty better than I have done mine . . . and take profit by me.

Be kind to Emma . . . and Mrs. Morland . . . for my sake . . . and brown your very best."

And to the little fender also, her soul said good-bye; and to the lamp that had lighted so many nights of her happiness in the great agone; and to the brass boiler tap; and to the warming-pan. All over the house she would have liked to wander, raining her mild, sorrowful tears . . . and saying her spiritual good-byes to these dear, inanimate friends of her vanished happiness; but it might not be. Into her mackintosh she stole at length—that rustled like marsh flags, for all her care—slipped on her shoes, gathered up her parcel, and passed out of the kitchen on cautious tip-toe. But a few more moments and she had renounced the comfortable roof of red tiles that had made so pleasant a shelter over her head these years past. Now there intervened no shield between that dear head and the stern, starry sky; so severely calm and clear and dispassionate. No hope from there, dear child, though you lift your lips to it and invoke its mercies. Others too, as tender—though not more fair—have confided themselves so, and sunk in the great world's ocean beneath these self-same stars.

And thus, with one long, drenched, searching gaze of tears, sideways up the wall of the house that had held her, good-night and good-bye!

CHAPTER LIV

THE schoolmaster, never a sound sleeper at the best of times, this night slept his worst. Being but a novice in practical iniquity, and lacking yet the reposeful assurance that lulls the veteran evil-doer upon his pillow, and gives him slumber unknown of the godly, who have consciences to lie upon their breast like lobster, he tossed hotly between his sheets. Sleep came to him, indeed, but it was a troubled sleep, blown across his mind's sky in fitful patches, like the clouds that had scudded seawards over the land this day, and gave him no repose.

Thoughts, like teetotums, spun too fast for the mind's eye to recognise the figures on them. But always the basis of his delirium was Pam; the ceaseless desire of her possession; his love of her; his remorse of the evil that had been done to get her; her horror of him that his act had inspired in her; wild resolutions to atone to the girl for his past iniquity by his future dedication to her worship; to justify the means by the end, and make her bless him at last for the sin that had brought them together.

So his mind was spinning on its unchecked dizzy orbit in space through the hours, like a star through the centuries, when all at once, with a shock that shuddered him from head to foot, some unseen power arrested its flight as with an omnipotent hand, and left him wide-eyed and wakeful on his bed; no star at all now, but the bed-bound, trembling body of a man, filled with sudden fear and apprehension.

What had happened? Had his being just wrested itself from the bonds of a horrid nightmare? Had he been dreaming or thinking when the shock came? He could remember nothing, whether it had been dream or reflection, to which he could attribute the alert horror of this moment. It had dropped upon him from somewhere without himself; as though it had been a mighty, soundless peal of thunder, shaking his soul to its foundations. His thoughts he could recall with equanimity; there was nothing in them to cause him fear—and still fear filled him, the more greatly for having nor form

nor expression. Fear, or apprehension, filled him to such extent that the cold, tingling fingers of terror crept up his scalp, from neck to forehead, brushing all his hairs the wrong way; and a great, boiling sweat burst out next moment upon his face and body. So men have been made aware at times of the doings of death, and the schoolmaster, recalling cases of the kind, drew himself up palpitatingly in his bed. On the cane-bottomed chair by the head of it, it was his nightly custom to set his candle, which he thus extinguished, with a hand thrust out from between the sheets. Thrusting out the same hand now, he possessed himself, in agitated haste, of the match-box, struck nervously for a light with the match's unphosphorused end, and with the red tip of phosphorus on the unsandpapered side of the box; and lastly, after much work of the sort, drew into existence a fitful, wavering flame, that died in giving light to the candle. Then he pulled forth his watch by its chain from under the pillow, and holding it out from him, fixed a disturbed eye upon its face. Half-past twelve.

Half-past twelve! No more than that! Ages he seemed to have been battling with the fever of thought. Could the watch be true? He pressed it to his ear, and heard the active click-click, click-click heart go beating in its busy little body. It had not stopped then. It spoke the truth.

He replaced it under the pillow, and remained drawn up in

was in his brain. The whole room was filled with the awesome presence of it. Death was at the bed-foot; at the window curtain; shrouded the candle. And then, of a sudden, thoughts of death and thoughts of the girl, circling round each other, came into horrible collision, and commingled, and lo! death and the girl were one.

In his guilty state of mind, he was an easy prey for terror. He tried to rid himself of the idea with a hundred assurances drawn from pure reason. How could she be dead? She had never died before . . . why should she die now? She was sleeping safely in her own bed, not four yards from him. Draw a bee-line through the wall at his head, through the landing beyond, and through the wall of the girl's room, and there she should surely be. Only last night he had been speaking to her; hardly more than four hours ago he had heard her voice. Death could not have come to her so soon. The idea was nonsense. But like a child, terrorised by things unseen, that the wisdom of grown-up logic cannot pacify, the more he reasoned the more his unreasonment grew. For all this ill-gotten authority over her that he had been wielding so unmercifully these days past . . . to what might it not have driven her? Desperately he listened—with his face turned toward the wall—as though death were a thing audible, like the tick-tacking of the big clock in the passage below. But the tick-tacking of the big clock, and the irregular thudding of his own heart, and the long-drawn snores of the postmaster, were all that he could hear. This trinity of sounds hung like a creaking door before his hearing. He was sensible of a deep and deadly silence beyond, flowing like the sea of eternity; but despite his desperate fishing, he could draw up nothing from its depths. Last of all, wrought to the supreme pitch of suspense, he threw aside his coverings, slid from the bed, and stole across the room towards the door—a miserable figure of inquietude in his thin, bare legs and short scholastic night-gown, that took him pathetically somewhere by the bone of the knee. Again, at the door itself he listened for a while, trying to cancel those three intrusive factors—the snore, the clock, and his own heart—and base his calculations on the silence beyond; but he could not. If he would gain any reassurance for his disquieted spirit, he must go forth and inquire deeper of the surrounding stillness than this.

And he went forth, and saw the moonlight bathing all the landing through the little staircase window and issue idly in

a pale, phosphorescent stream round the three sides of the girl's part-opened door.

Like a wide-mouthed statue of horror, he stood marble in the white moonlight and stared. Her door was open; her door that had been closed and locked upon her last night was open now—open so emptily and with such desolation, while the moonlight flowed placidly through it, like sea-water through the hollow hulk of a submerged vessel—that it seemed as if never it could have held the live, blood-warmed body of the girl. For a moment, the shock of what he saw was twin to the shock of what—so short a while back—he had failed to see. Then in his little, wasted cotton night-dress and his bare legs as he was, he started forward into action, pushed open the panels unhesitatingly with his fingers, and entered.

All to itself the moonlight possessed the room; filled it from floor to ceiling, from corner to corner. There was no girl. Her bed had been merely laid upon from the outside; she had not slept in it. There was her night-dress untouched in its embroidered case. Except for the callous, white moonlight, that showed him these things without a thought for his anguish, the room was empty as a sieve. The girl had gone; gone where and why and when, he could not tell. Whether with thoughts of death, or thoughts of flight, or thoughts of treachery—he could not tell. The discovery flew to his head like the pinions of bitter grapes. He searched madly about

pallid envelopes. He was on them at once, like a hawk. "To Mr. Frewin," he read on the first, in Pam's neat, well-known script, and ripped it open regardlessly, as though he were gutting herrings. So did his heart beat at him from within, and so did his brain contract and swell, and so did his apprehensive hand tremble, that for some seconds the piece of paper, for all the words he distinguished on it, might have been a white, waving flag. But in the end he got control over himself, and wrested the girl's last message to him from the paper on which, to all intents and purposes, it was scarcely dry.

"When you get this . . ." he read. Ah! that familiar, time-worn overture for stricken messages of grief. How many miserables, by water-sides, by lone lochs, by canals, reservoirs, and railways, have prefaced their journey to eternity with these four words. Scarcely a suicide so unliterary that, at this last moment, he cannot call them to his aid for epitaph to his misery. As soon as the schoolmaster read them, he knew all. Death or departure . . . this was the end.

". . . When you get this" (he read), "I shall be far away from Ullbrig, and you will know why. If you had done differently with me, I might have done differently with you. But it is too late now for regrets. After the sin you have forced me to share with you, I could never, never love you. The future frightens me. For all you have made me suffer I forgive you freely, but I pray God we may never meet again. I have been as wicked as you, and for this reason I dare not join our wickednesses, for fear of where they may lead us. Please forgive me for the things in which I have sinned against you, and beg God to forgive us both for the things we have done against Him. Pray for me too, as I will pray for you. Perhaps your life may be all the brighter and better for my absence. Strive to do your best that it may be so; and please remember, if at any time you are tempted to think hardly upon me, that I am not angry with you, and that I do not blame you. Good-bye for ever. "PAM."

That was all the letter told him—but it was enough. His face was like the face of a snow-man when he had finished reading. Not only was he smitten to the heart with the lost love of the girl, after all his lavish outlay of unrighteousness and sin, but now she was gone, and he was here in Ullbrig to bear the brunt of his deed. For he had no misconceptions as to his true position in the matter, as Pam had. He knew his

conduct for what it was, and his hold over her for what it was, and the world's judgment for what it would be. Her very going was a declaration of the thing he had held over her in his wickedness, and would have never dared employ. The worthless blackmail with which he had threatened her had served its purpose only too well. To such extent had the girl believed its power and feared it, and accredited him with the intentions of its use, that she had been terrorised into flight from him. And now the full responsibility of his act pointed at him with awful finger. To-morrow, tidings of the girl's departure would be out. Tongues would be busy. She who had been going to wed the schoolmaster had loved him so little that she had fled from him. Why had she fled from him? Because he had held a letter over her head that he had robbed from her desk—a letter belonging to neither of them—and by withholding it from its proper owner, and threatening the girl, he had got her to submit to his terms. When once that became known he was a ruined man. His love was ruined; his life was ruined. The death that had so terrorised him already must have been none other than his own. For rather than face this terrible exposure and degradation, he would die. He was a wild and desperate man now, holding the slipping cable of life and honour in his hands. To avert this catastrophe, to find the girl—at scarcely anything would he stop short. But what must he do? Where seek her?

Then followed assurances of undying love to Emma, and to the postmaster and to Mrs. Morland, with a list of such things as Pam bequeathed to Emma for her own use and possession. To all intents and purposes, it was Pam's last will and testament, pathetically worded enough, had the man been in any mood for pathos other than his own. To the postmaster, Pam left this; to Mrs. Morland, that; to James Maskill, the other; to Ginger—if he would have it—some further token of her affection. Only the schoolmaster's name, of all names, was absent. Its very absence pointed his guilt, like an index-finger. And at the end was Pam's own name, blurred and spotted with the tears that had fallen fast at this juncture.

But for these the man had no heed. He had read the letters, and they had told him nothing; now he must decide quickly, as he valued his life, and make the attempt to push this impending calamity, sinking for a fall like a huge door off its hinges, back from him. Within, he was all of a wild ferment to run about the house, to beat with his fists at the doors of the sleepers, and summon them: "Awake! awake! Pam is gone! Pam has left us!" But to do that was at once to publish the shameful history of his power over the girl, and the breaking of her spirit under it. Though need cried upon him with a thousand voices, he dared not awake this trio of sleepers for his own denouncement, and stand before the fierce, loosened breath of their indignation. In secret he had sinned; in secret he must bear his sin. What he must do, he must do alone, and speedily.

And first, he could accomplish nothing as he was. The remembrance of his ungarbed condition came upon him suddenly, and he cursed himself for his bodily unreadiness—although his mind had as yet no commission for his limbs to execute. Up the twisted staircase he pattered again, employing his hands on the steps in front of him like paws, to accelerate his pace, and take some of the weight from his feet, and thrust himself wildly into such few things as would confer upon him the requisite degree of decency to venture abroad. His night-gown he retained for a shirt, over his feet he pulled a pair of socks, slipped into his trousers, dragged on his frayed morning coat, that he buttoned tightly to his neck, with his collar upturned, and scurried down again to the little kitchen. There he sorted his own boots from the disorderly gathering for the morning's clean, strapped up their leather laces with desperation, stuffed the two letters into his coat pocket, caught a cap from the row of pegs where the postmaster's official

regalia hung, and scuffled down the passage to the front door.

Ah ! there was no mistaking signs of the girl's flight, or the way by which she had fled. For him there was no necessity to work back the big square bolt, or turn the traitorous key. Pam's fingers had done that service already. He was out in the street with scarcely a moment's delay, on the whitewashed step where Pam's own feet had rested less than fifteen minutes ago—could he only have known—closing the door upon him by stealth, as she had done, and looking up and down the roadway, divided lengthways between its far white band of moonlight and its nearer black shadow, with its serrated line of broken roofs and chimney-pots—like the keyboard of a piano—as she had looked before her purpose made its final plunge.

Which way had she gone? he asked himself, in frenzied supplication. For all he knew, she had been gone an hour, a couple of hours, three hours . . . four hours. Even now, while he was making this vein-bursting struggle to come abreast with her and stave off that awful exposure of to-morrow, it might all be ended. Destiny might have this shameful history written to the full in the book of record, and the book inexorably closed. Perhaps the girl's purpose had been maturing all these days past. Perhaps her plan had been prepared from the first . . . and in abeyance, pending restitu-

But the moon poured down in sublime, unpitying indifference upon its unlighted windows. The house was as still and unawake as the church at its side and the white graves beyond. Baffled, he stood and glared hatefully, with his hands twitching about the upturned collar of his coat, and his face working as though the house were human and he would have throttled it. Of all men in the world to help him, here, behind these luminous opal windows, was the man, and he knew it, and was powerless to evoke his assistance, grinding his teeth together in the fierce agony of despair.

Motion took him in the legs again, and drove him down the narrow, crooked side-street towards the low road and Merensea Hill, between the rows of tumbled cottages, with their yellow window squares. He could have drummed on them with his fingers, and in his desperation and need of assistance would have done so, but fear withheld him. As he ran, he heard troubled night-coughs rap out sharp at him here and there, where some aged sufferer drew breath badly, and wrestled for such stagnant air as was contained in the sealed chamber. The buzzing of some big eight-day clock, too, chiming a belated hour, he heard, and the fretful crying of a baby, being lulled to sleep by its weary mother. Heaven knows where his run would have ended in this direction, for it was become so blended and amalgamated with his consciousness that he could have as soon stopped running as the feverish urging of his thoughts. But at the bottom of the street, where the road dips its lowest before making the sharp ascent of Merensea Hill, he saw the dark figure of a man, and death could not have stopped him sooner. It was only Bob Newbit, smoking his black cutty, with his hands in his belt, and a coat thrown over his shoulders, come out to watch over the fire of the brick-kiln that glowed red in the field across the roadway, but all men were one man in their power to read the schoolmaster's dark secret, and do him harm. He saw the burning end of the cutty turn his way, and without waiting to know whether he had been perceived, or give the chance of a hail, he turned on his tracks again like a hare, and was forging up the street through the square lighted windows towards the Vicarage.

This time, without stopping in his breathless course, he went by. One way was as good as another to him, who had no reason for going any. He would keep on to Cliff Wrangham.

At first, panting doggedly onward, he ran this way as he

had run that. If his clothing had been on fire instead of his brain, like this he would have wildly run, seeking flight from the agony that consumed him.

But conviction came upon him as he ran. It seemed incredible he could be making all this desperate endeavour for nothing. It must surely end by repaying him with positive result. Little by little the mad, fitful uncertainty gave way to the madder flame of assurance. Of all madness, this fixed madness is the most to be feared. Now he was merely pursuing the girl, who was along here in front of him. At times, turning his ear before him as he lunged onward, he seemed to hear elusive footsteps; thought he saw her flitting aside into gateways and hedgerows to escape him. Once he staggered half-way across a grass close because he saw her standing in the middle of it, trying to deceive him by her motionlessness into thinking her some inanimate thing. When he came near she was a pump-well. Then he saw that he had relinquished the substance for the shadow. She was on the roadway there, in advance of him; her skirts flying, her hands to her hat. And he lumbered back over the soft grass, soddened by the recent rain, to the roadway, and resumed his forward pursuit.

Full of fresh strenuous desire to press ahead, and worn out with this unaccustomed exertion, he passed, half running, half walking, with his hand bound over his heart, and his

CHAPTER LV

Saw the magnified yellow window thrown over the pathway and out across the tangled grass to the mouldy green railings, from the Spawer's room. Here was life at last. Thank God! Here was life at last.

His heart gave a convulsive leap of exultation within him. Could it be mere coincidence that of all Ullbrig and Cliff Wrangham this man should be unnumbered among the sleepers? Could it be that the late light, flowing from that little low window beyond the porch, had no concern with his own misery and the girl's flight? He could not think it. Here was his journey's end. Let him take the girl red-handed in shame, if need be. Shame, even, counted for nothing in his love of her. Had she been dyed to the neck in iniquity he would have wished her, and followed to the world's end for her, without the lash of his own sin to whip up the pursuit. To hell or to heaven he would have gone for her. He was a terrible lover.

Slowly, with his eyes fixed on the sidelight from that fateful window, he advanced; arms outspread for caution, doubling inwards from his middle at each step, and making a semi-circle upon the grass to get sooner and deeper sight into the room. All at once his eye cleared the obstruction of trailing porch, and he stopped here, as though to take in fresh supplies of cautious reserve and get leverage upon the position. Then, more laboriously he worked forward again; his head far in advance; his knees bent; his arms like a baboon's, extended to the ground—as though at an alarm he would clutch at the long grass and draw himself into its shelter. The piano-end came into view. Its keyboard of chequered ivory lengthened as he approached upon it; next he gained sight of the mantel-shelf; and last of all . . . with his finger-nails clenched into his palms for self-repression . . . the man.

He was seated on an end of the table, with his back towards the window, and appeared to be reading or scrutinising something beneath the powerful light of the big hanging lamp.

What it was he bent his head over the schoolmaster could not see, but his acute, tormented vision saw something else that discharged itself at once in lightning of revelation through the whole length and breadth of his being, and blinded him for a moment with fierce, flashing passion and exultant joy. The room was heaped up under the confusion of a departure. There were books stacked together carefully on the table; music in fat portfolios; there were garments folded and unfolded; coats and trousers; boots on trees; and to give crowning evidence to his deduction, a big leather travelling portmanteau, open of lid, beyond the fireplace. Ah! was it any longer a coincidence, these two departures? Thank God he was in time. The Lord had not deserted him. It was the Lord that had brought him here this night.

Meanwhile, the Spawer kept his attitude, with bowed head of absorption beneath the lamp; and the man watched.

Yes; he was going. The schoolmaster had made no mistake. A child, looking in at the open window, would have declared as much. Of a truth, Maurice Ethelbert Wynne had had his last decisive bout with that big bully Destiny. "Come on!" Destiny had cried to him. "Come on yourself!" said he; had doubled his fists and closed upon his challenger, and now, with his moral eyes bunged up, his spiritual nose bleeding, his soul sore, he was picking himself up for departure. No mistake about it, he had been badly

The first, addressed to him in that firm, feminine handwriting—almost masculine—beneath a wealth of green stamps and postmarks, he recognised at a glance. But it had not been opened. Strange that! Which of all her letters had escaped him like this? When had it come? How long had he overlooked it? Still asking himself the questions, he turned his eye upon the second letter. That, too, was addressed to him in a handwriting he knew no less surely—though with less familiarity: the soft, neat, girl-like script of Pam, and that, too, must be unopened, for it was the first he had received from her. From Pam, of all people in the world. What had she to say to him? Perhaps this letter would explain the other. Very nervous of finger, he tore open the envelope.

A curious little letter it was, perplexingly short, that puckered up his brows and left him more puzzled after its perusal than before. It appeared to be, in some sort, a confession for an imaginary crime that the girl had committed —though wherein lay the enormity of it, or the necessity for this present epistle, for the life of him could he perceive. Pam, indeed, whose own guilt was so vivid that a word was sufficient to depict it, had thought that the same word could reveal it to all the world. Her letter was like the answer to a riddle, with the question lacking. Apparently, the Spawer told himself, the girl had failed to deliver a letter—the letter accompanying this, he presumed—and it had preyed terribly upon her mind. He was to forgive her, as she felt sure he would forgive her if he could only know what suffering it had cost her. And then followed an outburst of affectionate gratitude for all the kindness he had lavished on her; his never-failing goodness and patience. These she should never forget. With a concluding appeal to him that he should try and think as leniently of her as he could.

Think as leniently of her as he could! Bitter, cruel satire of unintention. Miserable topsy-turveydom of life, where all one's acts turn upside-down in the acting, and one's deeds misrepresent one with the deliberate purpose of political agents. Here he had been holding himself a supplicant upon the girl's mercy, and lo! all the while, it seemed their positions were exactly reversed, and it was she who imagined herself an offender against him! Oh, impossibility of living! To think and act clear truth in this turbid, earthly existence was as impossible as for flies to swim in treacle. All our thoughts were clogged; all our actions, all our deeds and doings. We could only struggle blindly, hold up for a while, and found

in the end. Life was but a struggle and a foundering. And though he was resigned to hold his hands up, and sink down as quickly as life would allow, this letter of the girl's troubled him. Did it mean she had never been sure of his friendship? Did it mean she had altogether overlooked the signs in his conduct that should have told her he would have forgiven anything . . . to Her? Had all their relationship been built up of vain imaginings and misunderstandings? If . . . for instance . . .

But he would have no more "ifs." Already he had had too many. What might have been and what was were as asunder as the Poles. Let him not revive the old unworthy desires under the cloak of If. What did the second letter say?

He opened it more slowly than the first—as though he felt a little the shame of going before its presence, and did not anticipate much happiness from this interview of pen and ink. But as he read, it seemed he could not tear his eyes away from their fascinating occupation. If Pam's letter had added cloud to his confusion, this letter was explicit indeed—and yet dazed him at the same time with an overwhelming sense of unreality.

The freedom that he had felt himself unable to ask of the Other Girl, in this letter she was asking of him. All the old stock-in-trade arguments of love that he had thought once of bringing to bear upon her, she was bringing to bear on him. Their attachment she pointed out was a mere how-

but only slight—only very slight. Love had been dead between them long ago. She was reconciled to that. But this letter was its official funeral—and it is a strong woman whose tears can resist the appeal of a burying.

And this was the letter the Spawer read with face bent down, while the man kept watch.

No wonder he sat motionless on the corner edge of the table, as he had first seated himself, poring over that magnetising something that the watcher, for all his watching, could not see. For what did this letter mean to him? Nothing at all now, in hard fact, perhaps . . . but yet . . . what tantalising riches in speculation. Here were his trunks, and here was he, all ready for dutiful departure—and in his hands was the instrument of reprieve. His duty had been remitted him. From that duty he was free. Who should say what was his duty now? Had he a duty at all—to himself, or anybody? Or was he, by virtue of this relinquishment, become a mere jellyfish, without volition, to float this way or that at the mercy of the tides? What was there to take him from Ullbrig now? What was to keep him? If he stayed? If he went? If this letter had come sooner! If this letter had only come sooner!

And the whole thing began over again.

All the old fever of reasoning set in anew with him, and rose up to its height. All the old desires. All the old wild hopes. He had been tired when he came downstairs, less with physical fatigue than with the dull, sleepless lassitude of established despair—but now he was very wide awake. His eyes revolted at the thoughts of being closed perforce upon a pillow; they wanted license to keep open house for his brain all night through. Suddenly, too, came upon him the nervous appetite for activity; the desire to give a bodily articulation to the movement of his mind. He felt as though he could have set off, and walked the globe round, and been back again here by to-morrow's breakfast. And submitting to the feeling, he rose all at once from his place on the table, turned down the twin burners of the swing lamp, picked up his cap, squeezed his way out through the two doors and the narrow porch, and set off towards the sea.

He walked with a brisk, purposeful step, for the night was chill beneath the white moon and the many cool stars. Part way across Luke Hemingway's big ten-acre field, at a sudden turn of his head towards some recumbent, cud-chewing cattle, his eye-corner caught the tail-end of an upright figure, vanishing into the hedge at some distance behind him. There

nothing, of course, when he looked, to confirm the impression, beyond the clear-defined, moonlit path along which he had come. But his eye retained such an obstinate remembrance of its own delusion, that at a few yards further on, choosing his moment, he turned on his heel again. And again, strangely enough, his eye seemed to be just eluded by the vanishing figure of a man. Had he been nervously given, he might have felt tempted to walk back and scrutinise the hedgerow that had thus twice afforded refuge to his shadowy pursuant. But for one thing, his mind was too busy for nerves to-night, and knowing, moreover, the strange receptive sensitiveness of the human eye, and the assurance with which it attests, as realities, mere miraculous figments of the brain, he passed on —reserving the right to turn again when he had given his visual informant an opportunity to forget its impression.

After a longer interval, therefore, he looked back again, on the pretext of stooping to his shoe-lace, and three times after that. Twice his eye attested to the presence of a furtive figure, that seemed to drop to earth in the thick fog grass when he turned, only now he knew that his eye did not deceive him. He was being followed.

That the discovery did not tend to add much zest to his midnight ramble—even had there been any before—the Spawer would have been the last to deny. It is an unpleasant

here and there little intermittent pin-points of yellow pricked the horizon where boats rose and fell upon the bosom of the sea. Then he lifted his leg leisurely over the gate-stile, by which he had been standing, and sat for a moment astride of it. From this perch he commanded the hedgerow—that ran down to the cliff edge at right angles—on both sides, and could not be approached without his observance. But whatever object his follower had, it seemed certainly, so far at least, that it was unconnected with any ideas of direct encounter. There had been no attempt to gain on him; their relative positions now were what they had been at the first moment of discovery; and it seemed he might sit here till daybreak without his shadow's making any advance in the open. Suddenly an idea to test the situation came into his mind, and on the instant he acted on it. The man, whoever he might be, was about fifty yards or so inland, on the shady side of the hedge, and watching the Spawer's conspicuous, upright figure keenly, no doubt. All at once the Spawer brought his second leg over the rail, descended, stepped quickly some paces inland, and drew into the hedge. Though the moon fell on him, the hedge was straggling and untrimmed, with somewhat of a dry ditch at its bottom, and long grass. Standing here, unobtrusively, it would take an active search to come upon him, and such a search would not only show him his pursuer, but give him some shrewd idea of the man's intentions.

CHAPTER LVI

It was not long that the Spawer had to wait. He had scarcely subsided into his position, indeed, when he heard, on the other side of the hedge, the rapid "rff, rff, rff," that told where long grass was being torn aside to the passage of hurried feet. The fellow was running, then. It flashed across the Spawer's mind grimly, as he listened to the sound of him, that he did not think himself of such interest to any mortal man. And almost before he had time to gratify his ironic humour with a smile, the mortal man had scrambled desperately over the stile, flinging himself to ground on this side of it with such a thud of precipitation that he had to preserve his equilibrium with spread fingers on the grass. Next moment he pushed himself upright again, ran hesitatingly forward some paces, stopped dead, and commenced to beat about in a wild, blind search on all sides of him, as though he were dazed with the loss of his quarry. For a moment it came into the Spawer's head as he watched him that perhaps the man was mad or drunk. Certainly there seemed little of rationality about his actions

looked as though any minute they might come down; loose, lifeless, shapeless trousers, whose bottoms his boots trod on at every step. Otherwise, he wore a dark cloth cap, pulled tightly over his scalp, with its neb scowling down to his eyebrows, and his breath came and went vindictively—or so it seemed to the Spawer—as though he had been baulked of something, and was panting more through rage than exertion.

And all at once, puzzled to fit some kind of a key to the fellow's strange conduct, what enmity or what design he could have against him, the Spawer's mind harked back to the two letters he had received this night, and to the enigmatical epistle of the girl, and in a flash he knew his man.

But though he knew him, whatever the recognition might serve him in despatching theories of robbery and violence, it served him little for enlightenment. Added, indeed, to his perplexity, instead of substracting from it. For what object had caused this man to follow him—him, his poor, crushed, and trampled antagonist—to the sea to-night? Had he not injured him enough, but that he must needs track him in this despicable fashion, and play spy upon his doings? All the hatred and unreasoning disregard that the unsuccessful have for the successful rose up within him at the discovery. Of the schoolmaster's virtues he knew nothing; sought to know nothing. It was enough for him that to this man he was indebted for his soul's humiliation; that this sinister-looking figure had supplanted him for occupation of the dearest territory in the world; and he rejoiced with a cruel and unhallowed joy that this, his vanquisher, had been given over thus into his hand.

Ten to one, were he only to make no sound, he could succeed in eluding discovery, for the fellow showed no aptitude in search, but success of this sort was not what he desired. He had been contemptibly dogged for some purpose or other, and he would have full revenge of the man's shame. Very quietly he stepped out of his shelter and showed his tall figure in the moonlight.

"You appear to be looking for something," he said.

At the sound of his voice, the man spun round eagerly on his heel, as though his first emotion had been of pure incredulous joy that his quarry was not lost to him. Shame succeeded upon that, to think of what the Spawer had been a witness, and his forward impulse was checked momentarily into

falling back on the heel that had urged him. Then, just as quickly, anger succeeded upon shame. Those chance words, uttered so carelessly, but with such a frigid tone of scorn—as though the Spawer in mind towered above him like an Alpine summit, and his lofty contempt was snow-capped—roused his wrath to desperation.

"You know what I am looking for," he said hoarsely, and advanced with both hands up at his coat-collar.

If proofs and hopes had been blowing away from him one by one like chaff during his pursuit of the Spawer along this inexplicable path, they were all collected here in that hollow, mocking voice that called derision upon his labour: "You appear to be looking for something."

Could the Spawer have had but one glimpse into the surging hot mind of the man at this moment, and seen of what wild charges he stood accused, he might have turned the sword of his words into a ploughshare, and tilled honestly for enlightenment. But in his own mind it was he who had been wronged; he who was down in the mire, and fighting on both knees for a little honour of blood before death. And besides that, the fierce, unexpressed hostility of love was between them. Even had there not been this present cause of quarrel to kindle anger, they would have been rampant for the fray like two rein-bucks.

"*I* know what you are looking for?" he asked, and his

at the same moment from this occupation, and crying out his confession like a wild triumph of delinquency; "I have been following you. You may know it."

"I do know it," said the Spawer.

"I say you may know it," the schoolmaster repeated, raising his hoarse voice another tuneless semitone up its chromatic of passion. "I don't care."

"Don't care," the Spawer told him coolly, "as you may be aware, got hanged. I would advise you to take profit by his example."

The schoolmaster's hands flew back to his collar again with one accord.

"You thought you were safe from me," he forced through his unsteady lips. "You thought you were free to do as you liked."

"I certainly thought I was free to walk along the cliff without being persecuted with these attentions," the Spawer cut into him.

To cut into the man's words; to bucket his meanings; to decapitate his sentences in their most vulnerable quarters—for this he was consumed with a godless thirst.

"Yes; you thought . . . you could trample on me!" the schoolmaster hissed at him venomously.

"I have not the least desire to trample on you," the Spawer assured him frigidly. "I would not tread on a worm if I knew it. There is room in the world for us both—if you'll be so good as to make use of it."

"You think . . ." the schoolmaster cried passionately, "that because you come from big towns, and live in fine houses, and wear fine clothes . . . that you can do what you like in the country."

"It seems I am mistaken," the Spawer apostrophised sarcastically. "In the towns, at least, we have the police to defend us from molestation by night."

"You think," the schoolmaster shouted at him, as though to beat down his words and tread them and his opposition underfoot, ". . . you think we country people are fit subjects for your scorn. You think you can walk over our feelings, and trifle with all our happiness as though we were mere paving-stones for your own evil enjoyments. You think we are the dirt beneath your feet."

"Indeed?" the Spawer remarked. "I never thought half so much about you as you suppose."

"You have thought it," the schoolmaster cried at him;

"and you are thinking it. Every word you say to me is an insult. You want to tell me that I am beneath your notice, and that your contempt is too good for me. You think you can mock me indiscriminately, and make a fool of me."

"Not at all," the Spawer responded carelessly. "I have my own business. You can do that quite well enough for yourself."

"But you are wrong!" the schoolmaster shouted, in a voice almost inarticulate with passion, and the terrible cooped-up storm of hopes and fears. "You are wrong. You thought you could kick me aside like a dog, and leave me to the derision and contempt of Ullbrig. You thought you could break up an honest man's happiness for your own wicked diversion, and steal off like a thief with it. But you are wrong. You are wrong." He was almost weeping—though the Spawer did not know it—with the insufferable fever of desperation. Had the Spawer known it, he would have had mercy, and surrendered this wordy victory rather than fight to the finish with the poor God-forsaken, love-forsaken, self-forsaken devil that cut and lunged so furiously at him. But the only conclusion respecting this encounter, glimmering at the far back of his brain, was that the man was consumed with the fire of an unworthy jealousy, and he took joy in piling up its fuel—even at the risk of burning his own fingers. "But you are

which way is your way, and leave me free to choose the other."

"I have not said all I wish to say," the man cried, opening and clenching his fingers. "You shall not shake me off, for all your pretending. I have found you in time, and I will stick to you for the rights you want to rob me of. You shall not slip me. Where you go I will go. You shall not get away."

The Spawer pulled his moustache, and looked the man up and down.

"Really . . ." he said, after a while. "You are a smaller man than I . . . but you tempt me very much to kick you."

In a second, at that threat of action, the pent-up torrents of the schoolmaster's rage and anguish burst forth from him. Anything was better than words. He rushed up wildly to his adversary.

"Kick me!" he cried fiercely, shouting up with hoarse voice of challenge into the Spawer's face. "Kick me! Touch me. Lay a hand upon me. You say you'll kick me. Kick me."

He pressed so hard upon the Spawer, with arms thrown out and flourishing wildly, that even had he wished it, the Spawer would not have had purchase to kick him. Instead, he receded somewhat from their undesirable chest-to-chest contact, striving by gentle withdrawal to mollify the man's mad anger. For he had seen into his eyes, and their look startled him. Not for himself—he was in every sense the man's better, and could have wrought with him as though he were a schoolboy's cane—but for the man. It was borne in upon him suddenly anew, with terrible conviction, that the fellow was mad; the victim of some fierce hallucination—whose fixed point of hatred was in himself—and he repented now that he had goaded him to such a cruel pitch. And still the man pressed upon him. "Kick me!" he kept saying, utterly deaf to the Spawer's temporising and persuasive utterances. "Kick me. Touch me. Lay a hand upon me."

To lay a hand upon him now, even in mere pacification, meant an inevitable struggle, and such a termination was too unseemly to be thought of. As it was, matters had gone altogether beyond their bounds. To have chastised the fellow with scorn had been one thing, but to be involved in a retreat before the hoarse breath of a passionate madman was another, utterly outside all dignity. Sooner or later, too, he would have

to stand or be forced over the cliff. The thought of the boiling sea below, to which, in the concentration of his faculties upon this ignominious encounter, he had been paying no heed, recalled him hotly, and he stole an anxious glance over his shoulder to learn where he stood.

And at that very moment he stood on the cliff edge, and it slipped and gave way with him. He flung up his arms, beating the air with them like wings, to regain his balance, but he could not. An arm clutched out after him, whether to push or clasp him he did not know. Half spinning as he went, he doubled out of sight backward; and if anything were needed, apart from the anguish of his own mind, at that awful, inevitable moment, to add to the horror of his going, it was the scream with which the schoolmaster accompanied the descent.

CHAPTER LVII

THAT scream—having no part with the man's self, but tearing forth from him as though it were a liberated fiend—curdled the schoolmaster's own blood. This culminating horror of a night of horrors took hold upon the pillars of his reason, like a blind, despairing Samson, and overturned the temple quite. Before, he had had just the madness requisite to carry out what unaided reason could never have accomplished; but now, madness filled him like thick, suffocating smoke, and extinguished his last guiding spark of lucidity. From head to foot he was mad; mad with a terrorised madness that is one long mental scream, like the unrestrained scream of his lips. First, as the man went over, and his own cry rang like a terrible knell in his head, he dropped to his knees, and bound wild hands upon his eyes, to blot out the horror from them. Again and again and again, with insufferable rapidity, he saw—for all his binding—the horrid vision of the Spawer's beating arms; the sickening collapse; the sudden emptiness of sky. Again and again and again his own cry tore out in his ears. If his brain had been one great slate, and this cry the screech of a perpendicular pencil torn across it, it could not have scored it more terribly. All his hallucinations were reversed and turned against himself. His mind had no mercy upon him; he was a murderer. This was the death that came to him upon his bed. The horror of now fitted the horror of then like a bolt. He was a murderer, fore-ordained. The hot brand of Cain was on his brow. Twice the fatal cliff called upon him to come and look over at the scene of his crime, but twice he heard the surging of the sea below, and twice he dared not. Then the irresistible magnetism of his own murder drew him, and he crept forth the third time on all fours, and peered awfully over upon a small projecting shelf of the cliff. Close down by the roaring surf the Spawer lay stretched on his back, and looked with his dead face up at him. As he had fallen, so he lay. His head was to the sea; his feet toward the cliff at which they had struggled so desperately for hold; his right hand, by the force of rebound, had jumped across his breast,

and seemed placed in mocking attestation upon his heart; his left lay limply from him without a bend, its palms turned upward, its fingers partly closed; his chin was thrown up, white and ghastly; his face a little sideways upon his cheek, as though in renunciation of this dark, wicked world, and seeking slumber. A very different figure of a fellow, indeed, from that proud six-foot of scathing independence that had mocked this miserable onlooker from above. And yet, how terribly triumphant. Even on his back, without a word between his lips, or a look in his eyes, he had more of majesty at this dread moment than life could ever have given him.

And so thought the man who, blindly seeking but to prevail, had put death's conquering sceptre in his hands. For the one moment of his guilty gaze he saw with clear eyes, freed from madness—as people are free from worldly thoughts that take their look upon the dead. But the moment passed, and his madness descended upon him once more, like the cloud of a whirlwind. It swept him to his feet, and drove him blightingly before it—anywhere away from the scene of that awful fall and cry. Before, he might have killed himself, but now, with the horror of death before his eyes, and ringing in his ears, he dared not die. Over gate and by hedgerow, through field and fence; beating and battling a mad passage for his flight against the armed hosts of standing corn; pitching blindly over stooks in the stubble; turning and doubling;

CHAPTER LVIII

OUT of the dark womb of Eternity—and with all the penalties and discomforts incidental to birth—Maurice Ethelbert Wynne was born again.

With pangs, with anguishes, with flashes of light, and alternating darkness; with terrible struggles to lay hold of this elusive state called life, that seemed floating somewhere about and above him, if he could only secure it, he drew shuddering breath of consciousness at last upon his little six-foot couch, and saw, through tremulous eyelids that were yet powerless to open themselves, a multitude of round things shining.

They were so many, and their light so marvellously great, that he went off through pain into darkness forthwith, and abode there for a space. Thence, after awhile, he commenced to struggle inwardly again for the life he had once laid hold of, and groping, found it; and looked through his impotent lashes once more, and at once the multitude of round things shining fell in, and hurt him, and a second time he let life go quite quietly, and relapsed into his darkness. But the taste for life, once awakened, cannot be so inanimately surrendered. Cost what cost in pain, lips will keep returning periodically to the cup—each time with further strength of fortitude for pain—till in the end hands are strong to grasp and retain, and life, sipped at first, is gulped with eager mouthfuls. And so, slowly but surely, the Spawer returned again and again to his multitude of hurting things, and looked upon them diligently, and patiently learned their shape, and studied them, and knew them in the end for moons. Vague, shadowy remembrances of a former life, or premonitory forecasts of the life he was now about to live, floated—not in his mind, for he had as yet no concentrated point of consciousness that could be called a mind—but, dispersed and uncollected, all about the dark void of his being. Names that he did not know for names flitted hauntingly about him, like bats—names that, as though he were a mere baby, he had not the strength or the capacity to utter, but that he somehow recognised and knew. One name, in particular, came to him in his dusky sojourn, and

with him; a blessed, dove-like messenger of a name, whose presence was peace. When it departed from him he was troubled, and sought for it, as a blind kitten seeks after the breast. When he found it again he was content with his darkness; quite content to lie and be conscious that he was alive.

Then, to names succeeded shapeless dreams; after-shadowings or forecastings, as the case might be, snatched by violence from Eternity, and bringing him pain. Shadowy figures in conflict he seemed to see; men running; men pursuing; men wrestling; men falling—not men, as men are, but men as his infant mind conceived them, dark and formless and blurred; men like trees walking, whose movements disturbed him painfully; men crying; men screaming. When they screamed, instinctively he sought the shelter of darkness once more, for he could not bear the sound of that scream. It frightened him from life. Yet after awhile, he would be back at the moons again, nibbling at them industriously with his intelligence, like a mouse at cheese. They were moons now, he knew quite well. He did not know them as such by name, but he understood the substance of the things seen, and thus feeding on them and deriving nourishment, his consciousness thrived. One by one it diffused itself through the darkened channels and subways of his being. It reached his ears, and he heard a great buzzing, and a roaring and a beating—as

compressed insufferably within the space of one moment. Life, that had been unoccupied, teemed all at once with the fever of activity. A hundred incidents seemed in progress within him at one and the same instant. His lips were useless to him for speaking, but from somewhere in his throat came a voice that poured out from him unceasingly, as though it were a tap, accompanying with narrative the course of events. Still, though all the forces of life and thought were humming at high pressure inside him, was he powerless to burst the fetters of his body. Like an iron man he lay, with his one arm extended, and his one arm bent, and his chin thrown upward, and his legs stretching from him to their limp extremities—miles and miles and miles away. Over and over again in mind he got the victory over this unresponsive flesh, and rose with it, and looked about him at the encompassing multitude of moons; and over and over again his mind returned dejectedly to its recumbent habitation, and knew itself deluded. The desire for movement was become a nightmare. All his being wrought in motionless agony to wake up his dead limbs to life, as his soul had been wakened. The horror of this inactivity grew upon him and focussed itself to a great, loud, liberative cry that should cut his bonds like a knife and loose him from this awful lethargy. But though the cry was within him, all prepared, his lips could not utter it. He was lead-weighted; feet, hands, legs, eyelids —not a member to help him.

And then the cold wetness fell upon his face and forehead a second time, and with a terrible spasm of anguish he pushed his cry. All heaven seemed to ring with it in his tortured imagination; he could not have conceived that the bulk of his effort had been wasted mentally before it reached his lips, and that the residue of physical impulse would scarcely have sufficed to deflate a kitten's lungs. Just another cry or two like this, thought he, as he rested from the exertion of it, and he would burst forth from his bondage and be free.

And again, with titanic intention, and the merest inappreciable flattening of his diaphragm, he launched his pitiable mew.

And this time it suddenly seemed to him that he had awakened some external sympathy on his behalf; that other forces were being brought to bear upon him from without—how, or whence, or why, he knew not. Voices—or his mental equivalent for voices—seemed disturbing the atmosphere of his being; besieging him, trying to lay hold upon his voice

and give him a ladder to outer life. The moons too, as he stared at them through his eyelashes, appeared moving about in agitated disorder this way and that above the high wall of blackness that fronted him. Then, something detached itself from the wall-top, and slid downward with a rattle. He was here! He was here! Didn't they see him? In went his stomach feebly again, and he ejected his agonised sigh. And while desperately he sought to aid the outer assistance, and proclaim his dire need—of a sudden his attitude changed. The moons swam backward overhead, the black wall rose above his sight. What his paralysed limbs had failed to accomplish of themselves, was being accomplished for them. Arms were under his neck, hands were beating his cheeks, voices were calling upon him. Oh, my God!—could he answer now? . . or would they let him go again before he could find speech, and leave him? That terrible paroxysm of desire shot in fire of pain to the cold uttermost limits of him. Something was breaking down—some great barrier was giving. Oh, go on beating; go on beating. For God's sake, go on beating and calling and sustaining — that he might have aid to consummate his freedom. He was coming . . . he was coming. Just another wrench and he would have thrown the blindness off him. And the beating did not cease, neither the calling nor the sustaining.

CHAPTER LIX

YES, it was Pam's own self that knelt beside him and sustained him, her arms wound supportingly about his helpless body, his head on her knee, and shed tears of warm thankfulness over his lifted face, and caressed him eagerly with her voice.

"I thought you were dead . . ." she said tremulously.

His response flickered elusively to and fro at the bottom of the Spawer's being, like sunlight deep down a well; but he merely watched it with curious philosophic content, as though quite sufficiently satisfied to know that it was there.

"Where am I?" he inquired listlessly, after a moment, and then, out of sheer gratitude to the girl, without waiting to be told, subsided into peaceful slumber upon her knee.

So long as she was there to hold him and nurse his head, what more could a man want? To sleep with Pam for pillow . . . ye gods! But his period of blissful oblivion was short. The beating and the calling recommenced, and he was forced into opening his reluctant eyes.

"You must not . . ." he heard the girl beseech him. "Oh, indeed, you must not! Try to come to yourself. Are you hurt? Do you think you can stand?"

He heard the questions plainly enough—in his grave he would have heard questions that that voice put to him—but their import excited him little. What did anything matter, so long as Pam was with him? She would look to everything. Trust Pam. All he did was to dwell pleasantly upon the sound of her voice inside, and seek to slumber to it, as a child is soothed by singing. But though his soul longed for this peace, she would not grant it, but plied her questions anew with strange, inexplicable unrest. He had never known Pam so unrestful.

"Are you hurt? Do you think . . . you can get up . . . if I lift you? Shall I lift you? Will you let me lift you?"

He fished about listlessly for a moment or two in the depths of his well, and brought up the word "Eh," as being both easy to catch and to utter.

"Eh?" he said, without the slightest desire to be told for information's sake, and made as though once more to settle his head.

But she rubbed his cheeks vigorously with her hand, and roused him with her voice anew.

"Oh, please, please . . ." he heard her beg him, with tears. "Try to wake up now and answer me. Don't go back again. You mustn't go back again. Do you think you can stand if I lift you? Do you?"

"Where am I?" he asked again, in the same apathetic voice.

He didn't care where he was. Wherever he was, Pam was with him. That was good enough for his taste. He merely wanted her to nurse him, and soothe him, and lull him. All speculation, all curiosity, had been knocked out of him by his fall. The heavens might have opened now, and the sight of angels descending would have caused him no wonder. In his total indifference of earthly considerations, he was become Godlike.

"You are down the cliff!" Pam told him, shouting the words in his ear, with the twofold object of reaching his remote understanding and rousing him by sheer strenuousness of voice. You must have fallen. Don't you know what's happened? Can't you remember?"

hand go up defensively above his head. Next moment cold trickles were wriggling down his face. Some rested on his eyelashes and blurred the moonlight.

"What's that?" he asked complacently.

"It's the sea . . ." the girl cried into his ear, and wiped the wet tenderly from his face and lashes with an end of sleeve drawn into her palm by her fingers. "The tide is coming up. We must not stay here any longer. We shall be drowned if we do."

"Oh!" he said. Drowned, would they? What was drowning to a man who had been dead? And then, quite irrelevantly—its irrelevancy even puzzled himself, in a placid kind of way—"are there any mushrooms?"

"Oh, yes, yes," the girl told him eagerly. "Lots and lots of them. But not down here; up at the top. We must get up to the top first."

"I'm the boy for mushrooms," he said, and thought he smiled knowingly, but it was only his inside that smiled. The face of him never moved a muscle.

"See . . . I am going to lift you!" the girl shouted. "Let me put my arm about you . . . like that. Yes. And now like this. Now . . . so. Do I hurt you?"

My Heaven! Did she hurt him? The groan that followed needed no conscious bidding to find the outlet of his lips. His immobile face was broken suddenly into seams of pain, like the cracking of a cast.

"Oh . . . my poor darling! My poor darling!" the girl cried, lowering him a little, in an agony scarcely less than his own, and the tears started from her fast. "Have I hurt you? I didn't want to hurt you. But we can't stay here. However much it hurts we can't stay here. We must get you moved. I can't let you drown for the sake of a little pain. Come! try again. You'll help me, won't you? Now. Is that better? Is that better? Am I hurting you now?"

And again she raised him. In a measure the first pain had paved the way for a second, and being prepared for it this time, by twisting his face he was enabled to bear the lifting; but it was agony. Such complete change of posture seemed to shake up all the dormant dregs of his discomfort, like the lees of a bottle. His body was become no more than a mere flagon, for the contents of mortal anguish. His heart beat as though it had been knocked loose by the fall. All the inside of his head had been dislodged, and bumped sickeningly against the walls of his skull. His ribs were hot gridirons, on

which his stomach was being roasted. His back was on fire. But at least he stood unsteadily upon end. Within the compass of the girl's arms—as once, on that first night of their meeting, she had been within his—he stood rocking helplessly to and fro; his knees trembling treacherously beneath him, only saved from sinking by the uplifting power of the girl's embrace. Suddenly it seemed to him, with a warning buzz in his ears, that the darkness was coming on again. A great weakness crept over him and enfolded him.

"Let me . . . sit down . . ." he said faintly. He thought that by sitting he might elude the enveloping embrace of the darkness.

"No, no; not here. Not just here . . ." the girl implored him. "Not so near the edge. Try and walk. Please! . . ."

And then the darkness closed upon him swiftly as he stood in her arms, like a great engulfing fish.

But it disgorged him, almost at once. It seemed his own pain deterred it, and forced it to cast up so troublesome a meal. And slowly, what time he suffered untold agonies of body, the girl half pushed, half carried him from the perilous edge of their narrow shelf, toward the cliff side; weeping to herself for the pain she knew she was inflicting; talking all the while to interpose her soft, tender voice between himself and the keen edge of his suffering. Did she hurt him now? That was better, wasn't it? Oh, that was beautiful! Just

his night's packing, and the letters he had received. Even it occurred to him that the big lamp would be still burning—unless its oil were exhausted by now. It was all unreal and incomprehensible, but he remembered it and never doubted. This was no new life, but the old—to whose jagged splinters of breakage he was being so painfully spliced. What a wonder his breakage hadn't been beyond all repair! How on earth had he come, neck downwards from that great height—a height it would have sickened him to contemplate jumping—and yet been spared? The mill of his mind ground slowly, by fits and starts, and not over-fine. All its mechanism seemed dislocated and rusty and out of order; in mid-thought it would be brought up suddenly with a horrid jolt that seemed like taking his head off. The noise of its working, too, was almost deafening.

"What are you doing here?" he asked vaguely, all at once, of the girl, who, with one arm about him, was seeing how far he might be trusted to keep his own balance against the cliff. It was a question that had been glimmering at the bottom of his well for some time past—only, so far, he had never been able to perceive clearly why she should not be here as well as anywhere else. But now the strangeness of her presence forced itself upon him.

"I was on the cliff . . ." she said, speaking in quick gasps, as the result of her exertion, "and heard you fall. At least . . . I heard you cry out. You cried out . . . didn't you? as you fell."

"Yes . . ." he admitted slowly, for the mills of thought were grinding again, and he knew whose cry had brought him succour. Murderous, cowardly cur! Friction of anger set up in his mind and heated him — who knows? . . perhaps for his own good. Anything, only to rouse him.

The girl shuddered at that cry's remembrance.

". . . I heard you. I was by the boat . . . and I knew something dreadful had happened . . . and ran back, and looked over the cliff . . . and saw you, and scrambled down to you. But we mustn't waste time. Not a moment. If once the tide gets over here. . . . Do you think you can let me leave you . . . for a minute? I must find a way up the cliff. So." She withdrew her hand from him, holding it outstretched, however, for a moment, with fingers close upon him, in case he might show any dangerous subsidence. But he did not. "Are you all right now? Do you think you can keep just like that?"

He assured her he was all right, and could keep just like that. He was by no means convinced in his own mind that such was the case, but he felt his acquiescence due to the girl, and gave it.

And she, with a final adjusting touch of finger, that was a caress all told, consigned him timidly to his own insecure care, and turned her energy upon the cliff.

Even as she looked up its black, forbidding side, smooth and sheer, and clayey with the recent rains—and remembered the desperate abandon of her descent—her heart forsook her. Calmly, first of all—trying to stimulate her bosom to courage by deliberateness of action—she sought of the cliff for some mode of ascent; desperately, after awhile, when none forthcame, flinging herself at the slimy earth, kicking with feet for a foothold—that slid down with her when she used it, as though she had been trying to scale butter; tearing with her hands at straggling tufts of grass, that pulled out by the wet roots, soft and sodden—struggling, scrambling, fighting.

And at last the fearful truth was borne in upon her—or perhaps, more accurately, the seal was put upon the truth that her bosom had secreted when she sacrificed herself over the cliff-edge for this man's saving—and with tears, not of terror, but of bitter defeat, she came back to him. Oh, the agony of that confession! Yet with death so close upon them as this, it was no moment to offer the cup of false hopes. However she

anguished during these latter days, could not, in its wildest moments, have wished a more companionable death than this.

After awhile, the mills of the man's mind, slowly moving, ground a little grist for his lips to get rid of.

". . . Can you get up the cliff by yourself, if you leave me?"

He seemed to be talking to her out of the closed chamber of dreams. What he uttered reached her, indeed, but there was something between them yet, like a wall, that both were sensible of.

"But I would not . . . I would not!" she cried impetuously.

"But could you?"

"No, no, no . . . I could not!"

"Are you quite sure?"

"Quite. I could not. Indeed, I could not."

"Shall we both be drowned?" he inquired.

To the girl the question came with a callousness almost brutal. Moreover, it cut her to the quick to hear how this fall had blunted the keen edge of the man's susceptibilities. It was as though another being of an altogether inferior calibre were usurping his body. Oh, that for their last agonised moments together this terrible dull veil might be rent, and for dying happiness she might know him as she had known him in the past! And for this she maintained her weeping. But inside, the man was stoking up the furnace of his mills with desperate activity, to get work out of hand before this last. He, too, was filled with ripe grain of thought to be ground, and knew how bruised and blunted he was—and how little near he could place his thoughts to the thoughts of the girl.

"What were you doing . . . on the cliff?" he asked laboriously.

All his within was striving to find a short cut to somewhere, but his mouth would not let him.

". . . I was going away."

"Oh! Where to?"

". . . Anywhere. To Hunmouth . . . round by Garthston."

"Why were you going anywhere?"

"Because . . . because . . . didn't you get the letters? I left them on the piano."

"Oh, yes; the letters. I read them. But I didn't . . . know them." "Know them" wasn't what he wanted to s[redacted]



And the mills of the Spa
'I want . . . to ask
". . . before I die."
"Yes . . . yes." The g
catch their precious outpou
hearing for ever. "Ask me
"I want to ask you . .
was going back. The o
She asks me to set her free
any other one in the case,
me . . . would you have ma
And in an instant the sou
like lightning, and the girl's a
and her lips upon his lips, as
the poor remaining life out of
it an abiding habitation. Ye
side, with the last sands of his
could he not arrest this mome
"Oh . . . my love, my love!
lips that clung to him. "Wha
would rather a thousand times
me . . . than live and never l
And she poured her strea
and wrapped him about with
upon him. And in the fusion
mills of the man's mind burst
"Why did you come

But she clung to him.

"For my sake, then!" he implored her. "You are my last hope of safety. For the love of me, try and do it. We must not die like this."

And for his sake, with her old desperate hopes falsely revived, she redoubled kisses of farewell upon his mouth and lips, and threw herself passionately against the relentless wet wall of their prison. Now this side, and now that. Now trying to kick out steps with her feet; now trying to tear them with her hands, she wrought at this frantic enterprise, and the man watched her, and knew it to be of no avail. And then, at his urging, she cried out—lifted her own white face to the sullen black face of the cliff, and cried—cried with words, and rent the air with inarticulate screams. But all was one. Like a thick blanket the cliff, so close upon her, muffled her mouth and smothered the voice that issued from her.

"It is no use . . . no use," she said, and came back to the man. "God will not listen to our prayers. To-night He wants us."

And at the same moment the cruel, horrible sea, that had been boiling turbulently about the far brink of their ledge, with occasional casts of foam, thundered against the cliff, as though to the collected impulse of intent, and rushed up, roaring, and gained the summit of their slender refuge at last, and curled a scornful, devastating lip of water over it. They stood for a moment like marble, the two of them, at this clear message from the mouth of death; watching the water slide back after the retreating wave, and pour away at either side of their earthen shelf amid an appalling effervescence, and then the girl woke up again.

"It will not be long . . . now," she said, very quietly.

Then she went to the man and laced her arms about him—trying here and there for the position that should best secure their complete union—with as much matter of fact as though she were lacing a corset. And when she had secured that and helped him to wind his arms in turn about her, she laid her lips over his and fastened them.

"Promise me . . ." she said, "you will not . . . let go of me . . . when the time comes."

"I promise you," the man answered, very huskily.

"May I call you . . . Maurice . . . before we die?" she asked, and her voice faltered at this.

"Please . . ." he begged her; and she said "Maurice" a time or two.



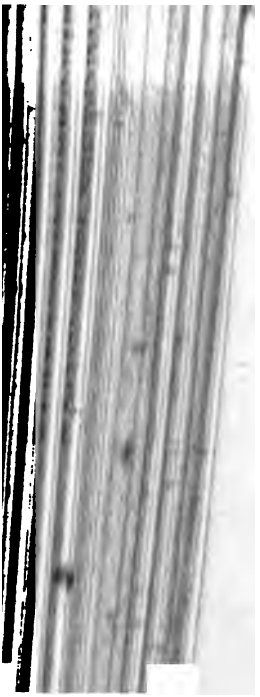
And there being nothin
for death.

CHAPTER LX

On this same eventful evening, the absent Barclay o' Far Wrangham returned to himself by slow stages from nowhere in particular, at some vague, indeterminate point between Hunmouth, Sproutgreen, and Ullbrig, having missed Tankard's bus by a small matter of two days and one night.

Out of five golden sovereigns that had gone forth with him, he retained a halfpenny, which, wedged tight in the corner of his trouser's pocket, kept troubling him like a conscience at times. On his head was a brimless hat that some friendly cattle-drover had exchanged with him on Saturday. A tramp had picked up his overcoat and was walking the high road to London in it; but Barclay o' Far Wrangham still retained the new waggon-rope that had been one of his early purchases in Hunmouth market on his arrival; and with this over his shoulder he lurched onward. He possessed not the faintest idea of destination, but his legs shambled along with him instinctively, like horses that knew their road. They took him safely across fields, and over stiles, and along hedges, and down narrow pathways between standing corn, and through gates—that he hung over affectionately and went through all the most conscientious formulæ of shutting, and still left open behind him. Somewhere short of Sproutgreen he perceived a figure coming distantly down the road in his direction. At a hundred yards away or more he made elaborate preparations for its greeting; wiped his mouth; let down the waggon-rope to the ground, trailing it loosely by an end; took his hat off and reversed it; rubbed the cobwebs from his eyes, and held out an arm like a sign-post in attitude of friendly surprise. There had been a word in his mouth, too, for welcome; only it slipped him at the last moment, but he made an amicable bellowing instead.

"Bo-o-o-o-oh!" he cried, exploding loosely, like a good-natured cannon, whose recoil sent him staggering backwards over his legs till it seemed he meant retiring all the way to Hunmouth. By a gigantic effort, however, he resisted the backward impetus when it had sent him off the roadway



with a grudging
whatever to hope
had chanced to sto
hat, Barclay could
filled indeed with
"Wheer are ye?"
activity, making vali
"Ah'm 'ere i' fron
small show of fav
debasement with sc
"Are ye?" Barcla
himself with much e
div ah want to be?"
"Wheer div ye com
"Eh?" said Barcla
"Wheer div ye c
name?"
"Dix-(hic!)-on . . .
on his hands again.
"Which Dixon's that
"Dixhon o' Cli'ranga
"Ah've 'eard tell of
nivver though to let on
at whum (home) an' all.
pig, tekkin' misery back
man fro' this. Gan yer
be movin'."

question, and working the muzzle of his hat diligently in all directions about him, found to his surprise that he was alone.

The discovery troubled him, first of all, so that he muttered darkly in his throat like distant thunder. Then the brewing turned to sparkles, and he laughed deliciously on the grass, rolling over on to his back, and sprawling with limbs in air as though he were a celestial baby, brought up from the bottle of pure bliss. Lastly, his mind darkened to anger, and he rose to all fours, roaring defiance after his departed enemy. It took him some time to find his hat after this, which had rolled away from him during his Elysian laughter, but his knee trod on it at last, and the moments expended in its discovery were doubled in his efforts to apply it to his head.

A dozen times he clapped it down, sideways forward, and the same number it rolled off him, and had to be resought.

Last of all: "Nay, ah weean't be pestered wi' ye!" he cried indignantly. "Gen ye can't be'ave yersen proper, an' stay where ye're put, ye'll 'a to gan."

And "gan" it did, sure enough, into the hedge bottom.

"Lig (lie) there, ye ill-mannered brute!" he shouted after it, and filled with righteous wrath, picked up the waggon-rope and staggered to his feet for departure.

"Come up wi' ye, ye lazy divvles!" he cried at his legs, that, through their long inactivity, betrayed a certain tendency to let him down. "Div ye 'ear? 'Od up (Hold up). Dom yer eyes . . . if ye weean't do better ah'll walk o' my knees, an' shame ye. Noo, Punch; Polly! Kt! Kt! Away wi' ye."

And away they set off with him like horses that have suddenly tugged their burden clear of an obstacle. Through Sproutgreen he drove his indignation at full tilt, calling out the cause of it to lighted windows and doorways and gateposts as he went.

"Gum! it's tonnin cold," he decided, after some progress.

"Ah nivver knowed it ton so cold of a neet this time o' year," he added, a while later.

And a short way further up the road:

"Gum . . . bud ah feel it i' my yed (head) strangelins!" he declared, and putting up an inquisitive hand to learn the cause of it, was blankly amazed to discover himself hatless.

"Well! of all . . . bud that's a caution!" he said, and stopped as dead as his legs would let him. "Ah know very well ah 'ad 'er safe when ah started. It caps me what's gotten 'er—ah nivver felt 'er gan. Wind mun 'a tekken 'er

while ah 'ad my yed tonned. She wouldn't 'a gotten 'er gen (if) ah'd been lookin', ah'll a-wander. Well . . . it's no use seekin' after spilt milk. Noo ah s'll 'a to mek best on it."

The best of it he made forthwith; and to compensate for this frigidity of head he put such warmth of pace into his advancement that at times—with his head a body's length in front of his feet, and his feet churning in the rear like twin-screws—his progress was considerable. To have stopped under a road's length would have been to fall as flat as a pancake. Nothing short of the most gradual arrest could preserve his equilibrium, and as the easiest solution of the problem was not to stop at all, he forged ahead till the wind whistled on either side of his ears. And this constant freshness, combined with the exposed state of his head, so sobered and revivified him that, by the time he was passing through familiar Ullbrig, he had already discarded Dixon's name in favour of his own; knew what houses were which, and who lived in them; the day of the week; how long he had been absent; and was commencing, in common with the history of all these nocturnal or matutinal returns, to see the evil of drink, and speak openly of wine as a mocker.

Moodily pursuing this well-trodden path of his conversion, he slammed his way through the gates, one after another, and passed Dixon's sleeping farm-stead with a covetous eye upon its moonlit windows.

location. He was sufficiently sober by this time to realise how very drunk he had been, and in the desolating flatness of life's Sahara—lacking any pleasant green oases of illusion—that he was laboriously traversing now, he knew the sound to have been produced by real, living, human lips; for his own brain was far too stagnant to create fancies. Therefore he eased the wain-rope to the ground, and holding up his open mouth to the sky, as though it were an ear-trumpet, he listened for a repetition of this discordant note in Nature.

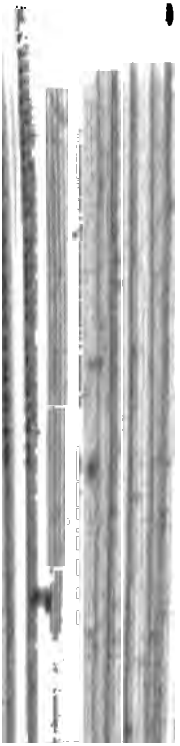
And again it came: small, faint, embosomed in the roaring surge, but cutting as a diamond.

This time he had no doubt. It came from over the cliff, and had the despairing ring of death and danger in it, that not even returning prodigals like Barclay can by any means mistake, though they'd gone away with twenty pounds in their pockets instead of five. And bellowing response at the top of his lungs, he ran to the cliff edge.

"A-a-a-a-ay! 'Ello! Noo wi' ye! What's amiss?" he cried, and dropping on hands and knees, thrust his head recklessly over the brink of it.

And again the cry rang out from almost straight below him—shriller and more terribly charged this time with the agony of animated hope.

"Lord Almighty!" said Barclay; "it's a lass."



To this day the tale
Ullbrig. How Barcla
where he had sold th
drunk the money, h
assistance, beaten out c
the edge of the cliff, and
figures sticking to the si
basin. How, even whil
again as though it were
they were, and made hin
he might not see when tl
they were still there wh
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the cliff-brink, and how they had toiled him over; and how the girl had thrown herself beside him, and taken him into her arms, and wiped his streaming face, and called upon him by name, with a hundred solicitations and endearments, and kissed him.

Till, in Barclay's own words: "Ah think there's one ower monny on us," he told them.

And the tale, continuing, recounted how these two, Barclay and the girl, made a seat with their hands, and bore the man back to Dixon's between them; and how the man, wringing wet though he was, kept falling asleep on the shoulders of one or other of them, and telling Barclay he was the boy for mushrooms, and he'd eat them now she'd given him up. And how they got him home at last, and how Barclay took double handfuls of earth and flung them up at Dixon's window, and how Dixon put his head out first of all, and cried:

"Naay, Barcl'y, man! Naay, naay! Next farm. Ye want to tek more care i' countin' when ye come 'ome this time o' daay."

And wouldn't believe Barclay's reasons for bringing him down, till Pam joined her voice with his, when he said: "Well! Ah don't know!"—and the whole household stood on its legs that same moment.

And then a mighty fire was roused up in the kitchen, out of the grate's still hot embers, at Miss Bates' blowing, and the blinds were pulled down carefully by Mrs. Dixon, and all extraneous elements—men, and so forth—were unceremoniously banished, and Pam, shivering, crimson-eared, bright-eyed, and hectic—but wildly joyous—let them skin her of her sodden habiliments as though she had been a drowned rabbit, and was rubbed dry with coarse kitchen towels till her white, starved body glowed like a sunset over snow. And Jeff, having been despatched at Pam's instigation to the cliff, and having run all the way there and all the way back, thumped lustily against the outer panels of the kitchen door, and Pam's parcel—looking, oh, so frail and pitiable and shamefaced in its new surroundings—was drawn in by Mrs. Dixon, and its contents bestowed, as the circumstances demanded, upon Pam's own body. And Pam seemed so genuinely overcome with their kindness that all questions of a controversial nature were by one consent avoided; and not a word asked—beyond mere details of the rescue—as to the strange juxtaposition of Pam and her bundle, and Mr. Maurice Ethelbert Wynne, along the cliff at this time of morning. To such degree, indeed, did

Pam's own tearful, lip-quivering emotion of gratitude play upon her two ministrants, that they discharged their self-sought duties in a reflected emotion scarcely less profound than the original; giving the girl tear for tear, and quiver for quiver.

And when they had rubbed and towelled her, they dressed her in the same loving, lavish way, and vied with each other in finding articles from their own wardrobe which might fit the girl; and when they had finished with her, they looked upon her completed presentment as proudly as though they'd actually made her.

And while Pam was being in this way taken to pieces and readjusted and put together again, Barclay and Dixon did the same by the Spawer, upstairs in his own bedroom; and laid him between the blankets with a hot-water bottle at his feet, that was fetched from the kitchen; and Arny harnessed Punch to the spring-cart and drove off for Father Mostyn and the Doctor—not that Father Mostyn's presence seemed called for on any urgent or spiritual grounds, but that Pam knew what a slight he would think had been administered upon his vicarial office, were he to be left one moment uninformed of such an occurrence as this.

And until the arrival of the Doctor, Pam's courage and good hope had never once deserted her. He for whom she would have died gladly twice over was saved, and the worst to be feared was feared and foundless. But as soon as she heard the ominous rattle of the spring-cart's return; that well-known clear-cut voice of the ecclesiast, and the sharp, Scotch, business-like tones of the Doctor—as direct and straight to their purpose as a macadamised road . . . she quailed, and her fortitude left her. It seemed as though the whole atmosphere were charged at once with electrical dangers at lightning-point.

She sat with her face plunged in her hands, by the side of the roaring kitchen fire, not daring to rise, or move, or go out to meet these awful newcomers, lest her movement might precipitate the danger. All her hearing was drawn out from her like wire, insupportably fine, to the doors of that dread bed-chamber. Sounds near at hand, the roaring of the fire, the fall of cinders, the subdued babel of downstairs voices, had no existence for her. Her hearing, as though it had been a telescope, was aimed above them to some distant star, and missed these terrestrial obstacles by miles and miles—but every sound from the far landing, every whisper, every turning of the handle, every creak of the bedroom floor-boards, was magnified a hundredfold. To support such auricular

sensitiveness it felt she needed the strength of a hundred bodies, instead of that poor tortured one.

But at last, lifting her face from her hands with the blanched cheek of high tension for the very worst, she heard the tread of general exodus; the resonant "Ha!" of Father Mostyn, and the Doctor's little sharp-tongued, Scotch-terrier voice, giving out its reassurance to the applicants at the staircase foot.

"Na doot he's had a narra squeak, an' ah'm no goin' to say he's oot o' the wood yet," she heard him tell them. "His back will have had a nasty twist, an' there's some concussion, but there's naethin' broken, and no dislocation. Na, na, he's no sae bad. Shock's the worrst o't. Dinna mek yerselves onhappy, he'll mend verra nicely. Oh, he'll mend fine!"

And going on beneath the Doctor's voice like an organ pipe, to support and sustain and enrich it with ecclesiastical authority, was the voice of his Reverence.

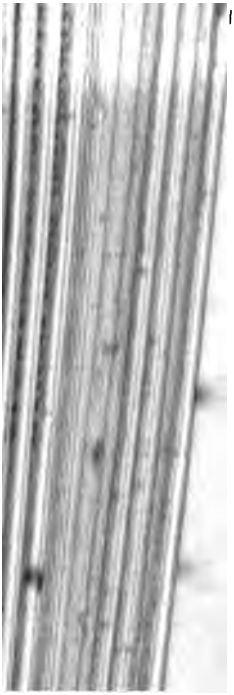
"Ha! No doubt about it. Concussion. That's the mischief. But nothing broken. No fractures or dislocation. No injury to the clavicle, or more important still, to the dorsal vertebra. It's purely a case of shock. Keep him well wrapped up in blankets, get some hot brandy and water for him, and see that the bottle isn't allowed to grow cold. Ha! that's the way. Beautiful! beautiful! We'll soon bring him round again."

And the tale, as it is told, goes on to tell how in Dixon's kitchen that morning—for day was breaking now—Pam made long confession of something to his reverence the Vicar. Nobody in Ullbrig knows for sure what that confession was, except the Doctor, who did not share the Dixons' delicacy in withdrawing, but sat in Dixon's chair on the other side of the fire, with his steaming toddy glass—compounded out of the sleeping man's decanter—and stirred the fire with the poker when it needed it, and was heard quite plainly to level his voice on such direct interrogation as:

"But ye hae not explained . . . so-and-so."

Or, "He may thank his guid starrs ye were there to hear-r-r! But hoo cam ye by the cliff at midnight?."

But as Pam would have told him freely anything about her body if illness had required it, and as she could trust him like Father Mostyn's second self, it would have been cruelly, distrustfully invidious to divide her carnal and spiritual confidences on this occasion with so fine a line; and since the Doctor felt no compunction in their acceptance, Pam felt quite tranquil



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the corners of his mouth, and a far-away sparkle in his keen grey eyes, as of one to whom revelation is no new thing.

"Ha! Beautiful! beautiful!" he mused, when Pam had finished, and was looking with a timid, sub-radiant eagerness from one to the other. "There'll be a scandal, of course. That's the proper penalty for not having confided your trouble into the care of Holy Church." Here the Doctor made a savage thrust with the poker through the grate-bars, and stirred and stirred up the red coals till they glowed to incandescence. "But better late than never. Leave it to me. Leave it to me, dear child. Our spiritual Mother never yet turned away from any supplicant that sought her with true faith and humility. We'll do our best for you. Of course, the business is not so bad as it would be if it had been unexpected. But fortunately, we've been prepared for it. No mistaking the symptoms. As I confided to the Doctor here . . . the affair, from the first, pointed to only one termination."

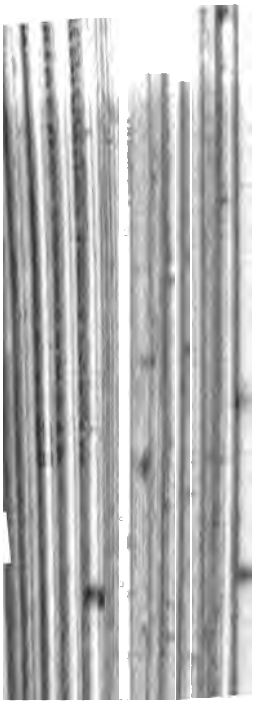
"Not tae me, ye didn't!" the Doctor negatived, with emphatic directness. "Ye said naethin' about tairr-minations tae me."

"Ha! Not?" His Reverence raised eyebrows of a reflective, incredulous surprise, as though he were trying to think through it. "I had the impression. . . . But. . . . Ha! Of course. To be sure. I beg your pardon, Anderson. Quite right! quite right! It was to my brother cleric I said it."

"Verra possible," the Doctor acquiesced, as though, apart from his own disputed share in it, the matter did not trouble him.

And the tale, as Ullbrig will tell it you to this day, goes on to relate how Pam would not return to the Post Office, but took up her post as nurse by the Spawer's bedside, and could hardly endure to let a bite pass her lips thereafter, for her care of him, till he made the mend.

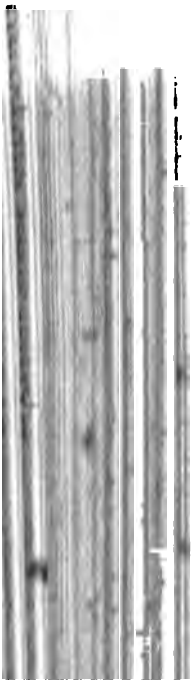
And that same morning, news travelled to Ullbrig that the schoolmaster had been found, roaming and raving like a madman, in the neighbourhood of Prestnorth—where a married cousin of his was living—and was in bed now at her house, with brain fever. Not likely to get better, the rumour said, but therein it proved false, for a fortnight later he resigned the mastership of Ullbrig School, and wrote, at the same time, to Miss Morland, requesting that his effects might be despatched to him by carrier as soon as she could conveniently find leisure to undertake the commission. Another letter



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ever edifying nourishment to those whose own virtue is no longer a marketable commodity, but it becomes flat meat and palling when eaten too long without the salt of verity. Therefore, as the days passed on, this early tradition of the Ullbrig Father's fell further and further into disrepute among the orthodox. Before such a man as Barclay it would never have been politic to repeat this primitive creed at any time. A champion of Pam's from the beginning—when he cried reproof upon them for their uncharitableness toward the child—he was doubly her champion now; strode up and down over the district like a mighty sower, spreading seed of her heroism broadcast from both his hands. And so it came to be that the real history of the girl burst its early grain of scandal, as though it had been sprouting wheat, and sent up its produce into the clear blue heaven of truth. To-day, when Ullbrig tells you of that Monday midnight, it only gathers breath of proud inflation to breathe how one of its daughters—by name Pam—went down the cliff for the man she loved, and how Barclay saved them both.



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breath in her lungs curdled thick to suffocation—he came out of his sleep, and his eyes opened incomprehendingly upon her . . . and she, drawn back in apprehension, with her hands clasped up to her lip . . . met his gaze, and knew not how to respond to it.

And then that glorious burst of certainty when recognition woke in him wanly and illuminated him like pale glad sunlight, and he struggled to free his arms of their coverings, and held them out to her . . . and she had gone into them like a dove descending . . . and put her own red, moist lips to his dry ones . . . and kissed his lingering soul back to life and happiness.

Ah! To have lived that one brief moment, as Pam lived it, was to have lived a lifetime abundantly. Now indeed that she knew he loved her for certain, and had had the true sign and seal of it, she was ready to die forthwith, if need were. It was enough to have held his love once in her own soul's keeping, as a child treasures the moment's confidence of some precious breakable vase. Pam was not greedy. She would have been quite content with no more.

But Heaven was kinder to this dear terrestrial angel than that, and filled every moment of her days henceforth with gladnesses as great, and greater. At times she wanted to get right away from everywhere and everybody; Heaven seemed to keep her plate replenished with celestial meats quicker than her soul could consume them. She wanted to dally with the taste of them, and extract their last nutritive juices of virtue. With the doubting hand of earthly experience, she sought at times to retard and press back this abundant helping of her heavenly Servitor, fearing lest His present generosity might bring her to penury one day. But He, never heeding, piled the good things on her platter, and she . . . well, she was only human, after all, and said grace, and ate what was set before her.

In a way, Pam's prayer was almost of gratitude and rejoicing that her love had been given to her in this hour of his weakness. While he lay there, helpless upon his bed, following her mutely with his eyes, the fact of his belonging to her seemed set forth and glorified to an extent almost apocalyptic. In image he was a little child, dependent upon her breasts for subsistence. Every moment furnished her with opportunities for feeding him with the living love that flowed in her own body. With love, as it were warm milk, she suckled him. Oh, truly, truly, he seemed hers when she nourished him thus

back to life with her ceaselesss attentions; with caresses; with sudden fondlings—such as only his helplessness could have made possible; with a thousand ministrations thoughtful and divine. Her thoughts were always of him; her every movement showed him plainly as the motive power. All the love of him that had been gathering in the stillness of her soul flowed out towards him now in a great psychic stream—as warm and broad as a beam of sunlight. From her fingers when they touched him; from her lips when they rested on him; from her attitude when she turned towards him—flowed this constant current of love, love, love. Like a very planet was the life of Maurice Ethelbert Wynne in these days—a luminous orb swimming in pure ether of love. The love of a true, good woman is great and wonderful, but the love of this girl was so great and so wonderful that in the strong tide of it the Spawer lay half incredulous on his bed and blinked. It was no love of laughter; no love of jingling words; no love of triflings or pretty affectations. It was a strong, tense, electric current of unselfish feminine devotion that set the very atmosphere a-quiver. When she came near him he could almost hear it humming æolian music, as though he had laid his flat cheek to a telegraph post.

And in a way, too, he was glad to be thus helpless on his back, for the glory of being cradled in such a love, and

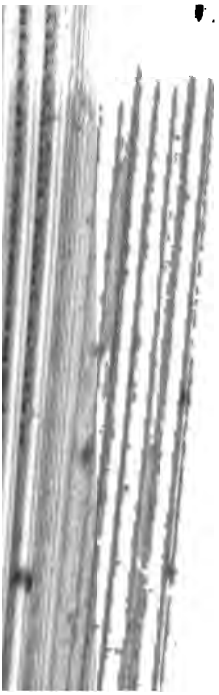
love like a cluster of caged linnets. At whiles, when the Spawer looked at her, such a proud and tearful tenderness floated into him that had he been another woman, sure he must have wept. Her confidence in him; her self-sacrifice; her unceasing devotion; her countless ministrations—frightened him for what his own conduct must be ever to repay them.

"Little woman . . ." he was moved to tell her, during that first day of his convalescence, ". . . do you know . . . I think I don't ever want to get out of bed or on my legs again."

Pam was plainly alarmed, for it seemed to her he had suddenly caught the desire of death which comes at times to those whose days are numbered. But he made haste to reassure her.

"I just feel . . ." he explained to her, ". . . as though I could wish to lie here, like this, for ever and ever and ever, with you by me to look at and make me happy. Kiss me again, Pam, will you? It does me good."

Then Pam stooped over him, as she was always doing, and slipped her linked fingers under his neck, and looked into his face first, and kissed him (praying for him the while, though he did not know that), and buried her face by his, and lifted it to look at him once more, and kissed him again. For who was there now to lay a forbidding hand between their lips? Who should stop her now from telling him she loved him, loved him, loved him?



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deft fingers here, for envelopes; and deft fingers there, for paper; and draw forth the pen, and wield it as though armed for the fray; and would spear the ink-pot with it, and wait upon his words with a persuasive "Yes, dear?"

And the Spawer would make prodigious pretensions of thinking, and not a word come to him sometimes, because of the girl's face. His mind held up its thought as an obstinate cow does milk, and never a drop could he squeeze from it. All he could think of was Pam.

"Oh, bother the letters!" he would tell her. "They stop my thinking about you. Why must I pawn my attention to a horrid old business screed when I want never to take it from you?"

"Don't you?" says Pam gladly, and melts over him with her smile, wrapping him up in such a heavenly mantle of indulgence and love and devotion that he almost feels himself among the saints.

And oh! the joyousness of that return to the outer life, when Pam led the Spawer out at last, she carrying a cushion and a little net-bag of literary food (a French reader and the like); and they betook themselves to the harvest-field, and sat down under the blue sky in the stubble, with their backs against the golden stooks, and watched the elevated figure of Arny riding over the sea of waving corn, like another Neptune, turning off the wheat from the tip with rhythmic sweeps of his trident; his eyes steadfast upon the tumbling crest of corn beside him; and they contemplated the busy shirt-sleeves of the band-makers, pulling out their two thin wisps of straw from the recumbent "shawves," splicing them dexterously, and twisting them—across their chests and under their arm-pits, till their arms flap like the wings of a crowing rooster—into a stout-stranded band, that they lay out in the stubble alongside the flat heaps of fallen grain; and they watched the harvestmen following, who rake up the loose corn into a round bundle against the flat of their leg, walk with it, so clipped, to the ready-made band, depose it there, stoop, gather the two ends of the band in their strong hands, squeeze the sheaf in with the knee, bind it, make a securing tuck with the straw, and taking up the trim-waisted shock by its plaited girdle, cast it aside out of the path of the reaper on its next round.

And then, when "lowance" time was proclaimed, this stook where Maurice and his Pamela were seated would be made the headquarters of the repast. Here would come the



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an' it 'd 'ave to be rubbishin' stuff 'at 'd tek me. Ah'm ower well known 'ereabouts. Appen ah mud get chance wi' next farm if ah change."

But the seed of resolution germinated in Pam's breast, and some days later, getting Barclay to herself, it pushed its pure blades through the warm soil all suddenly.

". . . Oh, Mr. Barclay," she begged him, going close under his broad chest, and showing the peeping hands of petition. "You won't be angry with me . . . please?"

"Nay, that ah weean't," Barclay protested staunchly. "Oot wi' it! What 'ave ah been doin' noo?"

"I want to ask you something," Pam continued, a little more softly, and a little more rapidly. ". . . Something very particular. I want you to promise something."

"Ay," said Barclay assentively. "Ah can promise ye, lass. Ah can promise onnybody, so far as that gans. But it's keepin' of it 'at's not i' mah line."

"If you promise *me* . . . you'll keep it," Pam insinuated very softly, but with an almost irresistible forcefulness.

"Ah'm none so sure," Barclay reflected. "Ah know what ye want to ask me."

"What?" said Pam.

"Ye want to ask me to gie it up."

"Yes," said Pam, after a pause. "I do."

"Ah've tried . . . lots o' times," Barclay admitted.

"But not for *me!*" Pam urged. "Not for the *sake* of anybody. Oh, Mr. Barclay . . . you don't know how unhappy I've been at times about you, of late . . . to think that you've saved my life—and his life—and put this happiness in our way . . . and all the time you're not taking any care of your own life . . . at all."

"Why, lass," Barclay told her, but visibly troubled about the eyes by her solicitude. "Ah'm sorry ye've let me be a trouble to ye. Ah've been nowt bud trouble to missen an' ivverybody. Bud where would ye be? . . . an' 'im too, if ah'd kep' pledge sin' last time ah signed 'er? Eh?"

"I know; I know," Pam admitted. "I've thought of that, too."

"Ay," Barclay took up, pleased with her admission. "It's a caution when ye come to think on it. If ah 'adn't been mekkin' a swill-tub o' missen, an' walked back when ah did—it'd 'a been good-bye to ye, an' long live teetawtallers. It just seems as though Lord 'ad called me to Oommuth for t' purpos—though ah didn't know it at time. An' 'ow am ah to know,



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exceedingly offensive to Jehovah. As the girl's spiritual and corporeal guardian, he charges himself with her care until she can be decently and respectably married. And they will go, all three of them, to Hunmouth at times, by Tankard's bus (oh, bliss! oh, heavenly rapture!) for purposes of shopping . . . and the sheer pleasure of it.

And the Spawer talks seriously of coming back to Ullbrig after the honeymoon, and fitting up a little place for their own two selves, where they can be near Father Mostyn, and all their old friends; and where he can work earnestly, and without distractions; and where they can escape all the jealousies and soul-corrupting ambitions of towns and places where they "live."

"Oh, little woman!" he tells Pam, "I can't bear to think of your giving up your own dear self, and letting your soul be shaped to the conventional pattern of the world. I want you to be what you are—and for what I love you. You shall see all the big places, of course, dear. We'll save up our coppers and manage that somehow. But let's see 'em from the outside. Let's go and look at them through glass windows, as though they were so many great shops, and come back to our own humble happy life, and break bread and be thankful. The world for us, dear, is just our two selves. We're two little human hemispheres that go to make our one globe, and if we're only happy in ourselves . . . why, let the other planets go hang! Because you love me I just feel I don't care how many people hate me. They can hate their heads off. They can cry 'pish' to my music. They can turn aside their faces when I go by, as though I were a pestilence. What I do I want to do now for you. I feel I would rather write a little song that pleases you, love, than compose a Beethoven symphony for the world to bow to. And why? Because, dearest, I know that the world is as ready to kick me as to bestow one ha'porth of its kindness . . . but You! All the pleasure I can give to you . . . is just an investment, which you can pay back to me in love at a thousand per cent."

"Isn't it funny?" says Pam, though without showing the least appreciation of the avowed humour, ". . . what love is. I've thought the same as you, too, but not put so beautifully. I just want us to try and be like what we are now, in our hearts, as long as we live. At times (do you?) I like to think of you as belonging to me . . . as though you were every bit mine. And at other times . . . I feel frightened of having *you. The responsibility* seems somehow too great. And

then I just think of myself as belonging to you. And all I want . . . is to creep into your heart, dear, and for you to shelter me. Oh, Maurice! To think. Six months ago . . . three months ago . . . I had no thought of you, or you of me! And we might never have met each other; never have loved each other! Isn't it dreadful?"

"What the eye doesn't see, darling!" Maurice tells her, ". . . the heart doesn't grieve. What we never know we never miss. But now we're going to make up for what might have been, aren't we?"

Pam says yes, they are. "And oh," she says, "if you hadn't found me, you might have found somebody else. Morrie dear, do you think it possible that I may be standing in the way of somebody you don't know at all . . . that you might love better?"

"Very likely you are, dear!" Maurice says, acting Job's comforter. "But anyway, I'm ready to risk you, and take my chance of what may be for what is."

And this time Pam is ready to risk it too, and does not tell the Spawer, as once she told Ginger:

"Oh, Maurice, there must be no chance in love!"

CHAPTER LXIV

ONE bright morning in late September, when the sky dreamed as blue as June, and the sun shone August, a stranger passed through into the churchyard by the lich gate, and his reverence the Vicar, having received telepathic intimation of his presence, along one or other of the invisible slender filaments that connect the Vicarage with the churchyard, emerged shortly from his retreat, like a fine full-bodied spider, and captured his prize by the side wicket, with a "Ha!" of agreeable greeting.

"A stranger within our gates!" he observed, in courteous surprise, rocking to and fro upon his legs in the pathway, and balancing the ebony staff across both palms, as though he were weighing theological propositions. He encompassed the sky with a comprehensive circle of ferrule, and thrusting up a rapt nose to appreciation of its beneficent blue, "You bring glorious weather!" he said.

The stranger acknowledged with marked politeness that the weather was as his Reverence had been pleased to state. He was an elderly man, soberly habited in black; had a black Melton coat, not too much worn about the velvet of its collar to be respectable; with greater amplitude about the knees of his trousers than had been allowed for in the cutting, and a compression of mouth that seemed to betoken one whose office exacted of him either deference or discretion, or perhaps both.

"A pilgrim to the old heathen centre of Ullbrig?" his Reverence inquired, with a bland dispersiveness of interrogation that seemed to embrace all eternity, and showed no sharp point of mere human inquisitiveness. "Brig the Bridge, and Ull or Uddle the Idol. The village of idols on the bridge. The bridge and the idols have long ago departed—in fact, the present church is largely built out of the stones of demolished infidel altars—but the heathen remain. Ha! Large numbers of them.

". . . An antiquarian at all? A connoisseur of tablets? or a rubber of brasses?—in which case we've nothing to show you."

The stranger, having first begged his Reverence's pardon hopefully at the second suggestion, relinquished it with respect, and said he was not exactly any of these things.

"Ha! . . . an epitaph hunter, perhaps?" His Reverence substituted agreeably, as though desirous of setting him at ease.

Nor scarcely an epitaph hunter . . . in the precise sense of the word, the stranger disclaimed—his respectfulness apparently pained that it could so little coincide with what this reverend gentleman said.

"Surely! . . ." Father Mostyn hazarded, with uplifted eyebrows of incredulous amaze. "Ha! . . . not a worshipper?"

The black-habited gentleman blinked obsequiously with both his eyes, and his mouth responded faintly to Father Mostyn's gentle breath of humour, like a withered leaf stirred by the breeze. Next moment, with some visible trepidation, he was moved to inquire whether there was any service that morning.

"Not at present," his Reverence told him. "But we can always make one. The Church, you see . . ."

"If my time were my own," the stranger interrupted apologetically. ". . . But I fear. . . . Thank you exceedingly. . . . In this case, you see, I am acting for others." He scanned Father Mostyn sideways with a deferential regard of inquiry, as though expressing "Pardon me." "The Vicar . . . I

stranger compressed his mouth for a moment, as though trying it, and then relaxed it again, satisfied with its grip. "I may as well be explicit on the point. Indeed, there is no reason, sir, why any particular secrecy should be maintained—except that secrecy in cases of this sort—investigation cases—is generally the better for all parties concerned."

"Ha!" said Father Mostyn, with such oracular assent that the stranger wavered for a moment, doubting whether it didn't signify complete knowledge of all that he had to impart—and more.

"I am here to pursue investigations on behalf of Messrs. Smettering, Keelman & Drabwell, solicitors, of Lincoln's Inn, who are acting according to instructions received from a client of some importance. Our object is merely to trace and establish connection with a member of our client's family—considerably to this member's advantage, I may assure you."

His Reverence looked speculatively over the stick as though the last few sentences had escaped his precise observation, and he were trying now to reclaim the import of them.

". . . A military family at all?" he inquired.

The stranger eyed him with respectful surprise and dubiety for a moment.

". . . An old family of importance," he admitted slowly. "I should say it might be called a military family." Then he stopped. "Perhaps . . ." said he, and looked at his Reverence.

"Ha!" said his Reverence blandly. "And the present client? An army man, is he?"

"The son of one, I believe, sir."

"To be sure. Precisely. The son of one. Beautiful! beautiful! One or two fat benefices in the family, do you know?"

"I rather fancy . . . there is one attached to the estate. There may be more, for anything to my knowledge." The stranger followed the lead with the resignation of one who plays void of trumps. "If you know anything . . ." he hazarded.

His Reverence stroked a gorgeous nose of wisdom.

"No mistaking the symptoms. Not a bit of it. Your client seeks recovery of a daughter?"

The stranger demonstrated as much surprise as his discretion and his respectfulness would let him.

"You can inform us . . . where she is?"

"Certainly! certainly! We have been expecting you. I

thought you wouldn't be long in reaching us now. To-morrow . . . or Thursday, I thought." His Reverence cast a fine finger of effect towards the white headstone, rising from the grass, beneath the east window. "She is there."

"Dead?" said the stranger.

"Ha!" said his Reverence, a soft assentive "Ha!" but creamy with meaning. "Your client is just a little matter of thirteen years too late."

"Her married name was Searle?" said the stranger, as though offering the fact for the priest's verification.

"To be sure. On the gravestone. On the gravestone. 'Sacred to the memory of Mary Pamela Searle.' And her father's name, of course, was . . ."

". . . Paunceforth, since you know it, sir, . . . of Briskham Park, Hampshire."

"He will be getting an old man," said his Reverence.

"Seventy-four . . . or five," the stranger responded, ". . . and very feeble. He has had one seizure already, and is anxious to make amends, before he dies, for an act of early severity. At one stage of the proceedings there was a child involved. A daughter. Is she still living? If you can give me any information likely to lead to her recovery, I may tell you that expense will be no object at all. No stone is to be left unturned, by our client's instructions, to trace matters to their final step. And I may add that . . . as this is now the last surviving branch of our client's family . . . and he is a gentleman of considerable wealth . . ."

"Exactly," said his Reverence. "I think it will not be difficult to conclude matters to your client's entire satisfaction. His granddaughter has been, and still is, under my safe care. . . . Just come along with me as far as the Vicarage. There are a few things there in my possession. Ha! That's it. Beautiful! beautiful! Quite an Indian summer we're having."

And that same day, before dinner, the news is racing all over Ullbrig that Pam's grandfather has sought for her and found her; and that she is to be a real lady at last, and ride horses, and drive carriages, and order servants of her own, and live in a great big house in a great big park, where deer are grazing and peacocks stalk the terraces, and will never come back to Ullbrig any more, but give them all the go-by now, and set her nose up higher than ever; and the Spawer is only marrying her for her money.

Steggison says to himself with a Satanic joy ·

"Noo ah s'll get a chance at post-bag. She promised me ah sewd 'ave fost try at it if owt 'appened 'er. Mah wod! Bud ah'll gie 'em James Maskill an' all. They'll 'a t' run when ah call of 'em—ne'er mind if they weean't!"

And James Maskill stands forlornly with his back propped against the post-house bricks, and a heel hitched up to the wall beneath him, and his hands in his pockets, and his mouth screwed to a spiritless whistle that can't produce the ghost of a sound; staring at nothing, and thinking of nothing; and feeling nothing—for life in front of him is nothing now, and he wouldn't have the heart to fetch Dingwall Jackson his promised bat across the lug, even if you caught him and held his head up for the purpose.

And Emma Morland is bursting with pride, and weeping with the misery of losing Pam—for this fashionable interment of Pam in the classic vaults of High Society fills her with a more terrible sense of their severance than a little green grave in Ullbrig churchyard.

And the postmaster makes an impressive chief mourner, standing by the counter with set face and lowered eyes as though it were a coffin, and telling his daughter, when she comes hither to embarrass him with her demonstrations of grief:

"It's all for t' best, lass, no doot. We s'll larn to get ower it i' time."

And Mrs. Morland, her mingled gladness and sorrow commingling to reminiscence, tells, through fond tears, how Pam did this, and Pam did that; and how she'd always thought of others before herself; and what a strange sad house it would be without her—and wept herself into perspirations, and wiped her tears and her steaming forehead with large double sweeps of her apron. And Ginger went off his food again—for though she'd never been his, at each new name with which hers was coupled, he felt once more as though he'd just lost her.

And Pam went dancing up to Cliff Wrangham that day, hugging his Reverence's arm—as sad as any of them, and so joyful that it seemed not earth she trod on, but the big round prismatic blown bubble of a dream, shivering warningly, all ready to puff into nothing and let her down into nowhere. And when they came to Dixon's, his Reverence dropped aside to have a friendly word with the Archdeaconess, on the appalling activity of dissent, and the dire successfulness of Wesleyanism *in* particular, as prearranged, and Pam went

into the little parlour, and looked at the Spawer, and said, "Oh, Morrie!" in a doleful voice of preparation. For, to tell the truth, though she was come here intended to play a little comedy on him, with a triumphant *dénouement*, her own conviction in things actual (including, for the time, their own happiness) had been so surprisingly shaken that, despite her errand's being presumably of gladness, she looked, as she looked at him, for all the world as though she had seen a ghost.

"Good gracious, darling!" said the Spawer, in concern, when he saw her. "Whatever's been happening now?"

"Oh, Maurice!" said Pam again, trying hard to win back assurance that he and she were not two mere unsubstantial figments of somebody else's dream, but flesh and blood, and dear and bond to each other. "I've something to tell you, dear—I mean, to ask you, dear. Do you love me?"

"Do I love you?" repeats the Spawer, with a look of incredulous surprise, and a tinge, in his tones, of severity. "What a remarkable question to ask a man—and at such short notice! Really, Miss Searle . . . I must confess you surprise me."

"Oh, but do you, do you?" begs Pam.

"Well, it's dreadfully, horribly sudden," says Maurice. "And you put me quite in a flutter. But since you're rather

"Would you want to marry me . . . just the same?" she asks.

"More!" says Maurice Ethelbert. "A hundred times more."

"Why more?" Pam inquires vaguely; her curiosity suddenly fanned to seek the reason of this strange great increase in his affection for her.

"Because," the Spawer tells her, "the less you are to the world, dear, the more you must be to me. The less claim the world can make upon you, the more I feel I've got you all to myself."

"You would still marry me, under any conditions?" asks Pam.

"Under any and all."

"And you won't let me go?"

"I won't let you go."

"Whatever people say?"

"Whatever people say."

"You'll hold me as tight . . . as you held me when we thought we were going to die . . . that night."

"Tighter, darling, tighter."

"Even if . . ."

"If what?"

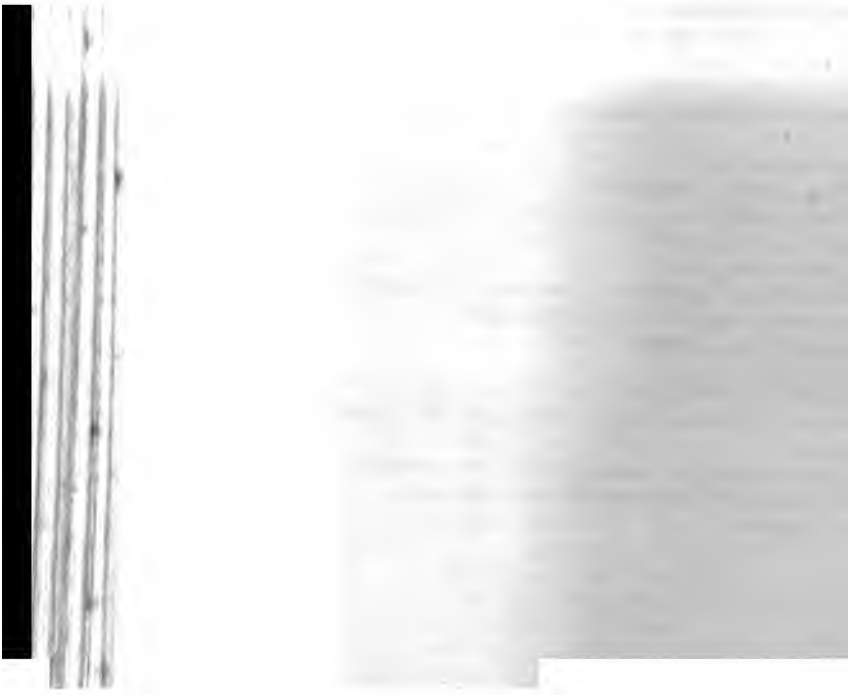
". . . I should turn out . . . just a bit of a lady . . . after all, dear?"

The Spawer is going to answer, but he stops suddenly, lifts up the girl's face, and looks straight into her eyes.

"Pam!" says he.

THE END

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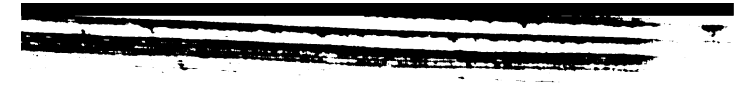
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